

Aberdeenshire Council

Passenger Transport Strategy 2025

Incorporating Aberdeenshire Council's
Public Transport Policy Statement

31 MARCH 2025

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1 Introduction

The Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) sets out the Council's objectives for passenger transport services to/from and within Aberdeenshire and incorporates its general policies in regard to public and other passenger transport.

It sets out the overarching approach of Aberdeenshire Council and is supported by relevant Council policies. Further information on each passenger transport policy listed within the PTS is available from the Passenger Transport Unit (public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk).

The strategy objectives are based on a lifespan of at least 10 years with ambitions to substantially improve the passenger transport offering but it is recognised that significant amounts of investment will be required to make a meaningful difference and therefore the Council will seek investment from external sources. For the purposes of the PTS, the term 'passenger' refers to users of road based 'public' transport such as fixed route local bus services, community transport and demand responsive transport schemes along with those using Council school transport services.

Over the course of the previous PTS, when delivering its passenger transport activities, the Council has focussed on the procurement of services through competitive tender, limited operation of in-house services and, where possible, partnership working.

2 Legislative Background

The main legislation relevant to this strategy is listed below.

2.1 Transport Act 1985

The Council has a duty, under sections 63 – 64 of the Transport Act 1985, to secure the provision of such passenger transport services as it considers appropriate to meet any public transport requirements in its area which would not, in its view, be met apart from action on its part. The Council also has a duty to formulate and publish, from time to time, general policies as to the description of services it proposes to secure.

When formulating policies for the purposes of securing passenger transport services, the Council must consult with other Councils affected by its policies and with persons operating passenger transport services in its area, and/or with operators' representative organisations. The policy statement must also be made available for inspection by the public. This Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) has been developed to fulfil these obligations.

2.2 Competition Act 1998

The Competition Act 1998 prohibits agreements between bus operators and local transport authorities that would prevent, restrict or distort competition. This includes limiting individual operators' ticket prices or availability however a 'block exemption' permits parties to agree multi-operator ticketing arrangements that meet certain criteria.

2.3 Transport (Scotland) Act 2001

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 enables transport authorities to set up multi-operator ticketing arrangements and schemes. It also places a duty on the Council to set standards for the provision of bus information.

The Act includes a competition test that applies to partnership agreements, ticketing schemes and supported service tendering.

2.4 Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides powers for the Council to exercise greater influence and/or control over local bus services. The Council may establish a Bus Services Improvement Partnership for the whole or a part of its area, within which it may specify route service standards relating to for example the frequency or timing of local services; and operational service standards relating to amongst other factors ticketing, maximum fares, pricing of multi-operator travel cards, information provision and vehicles used.

The Act also gives the Council the power to introduce a bus franchising framework for the whole or a part of its area under which it determines what bus services are provided and the power to hold a PSV (Public Service Vehicle) Operator's Licence and therefore directly run bus services in its own right, either in-house or through an arms' length external organisation.

2.5 Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 was established to consolidate all anti-discrimination legislation in Great Britain. It requires equal treatment in access to employment as well as private and public services, regardless of protected characteristics including age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Any new services and infrastructure resulting from the policies set out in the PTS will have due regard to the requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010.

2.6 Procurement Legislation

Aberdeenshire Council follows the procurement legislation set out in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015. The legislation aims to ensure that contracts are awarded in an open, transparent and non-discriminatory manner. It also outlines the procedures for local authorities to follow during the selection of tenderers and the awarding of contracts.

3 Strategic Context

3.1 Introduction

The Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) sits within a much wider local, regional and national strategic policy context which is summarised below. The strategy has been developed to complement each of these policy frameworks and help towards achieving their aims and objectives.

3.2 National Context

3.2.1 UK Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

The Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener policy published in October 2021 by the UK government outlines policies and proposals to achieve net zero carbon emissions across all sectors of the UK economy by 2050. This strategy aims to impact the UK's transport sector by:

- addressing the urgent need to tackle emissions from road vehicles and other modes of transport;
- encouraging a switch to electric vehicles and phase out new petrol and diesel cars by 2030;
- decarbonising road transport by making active travel and public transport modes the preferred choice for daily journeys; and,
- reducing reliance on the private car.

3.2.2 Scotland's National Transport Strategy 2

Scotland's current National Transport Strategy (NTS2) was produced in February 2020 and puts forward a vision for a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.

NTS2 is underpinned by the adoption of the following four priorities as the basis for decision-making and the evaluation of the success of Scotland's transport policies over the subsequent twenty years. Namely, to:

- reduce inequalities, through a transport system that provides fair access to services, is easy to use for all and affordable for all;
- take climate action, by helping to deliver Scotland's net-zero target, adapting to the effects of climate change and enabling greener, cleaner choices;
- help deliver, inclusive economic growth by getting people and goods to where they need to go through reliable, efficient, and high-quality transport, and the use of beneficial innovation; and,
- improve health and wellbeing, by being safe and secure, providing healthy travel choices and making communities a great place to live.

NTS2 recognises the critical role of delivering each of these four priorities and identifies that for the strategy to be a catalyst for change then it must successfully address the current and emerging challenges that threaten Scottish transport. It sets out a sustainable transport hierarchy which prioritises passenger transport modes as follows: walking and wheeling, cycling, public transport, taxis and shared transport, and lastly the private car.

It is clear that the PTS has a recognisable role to play in assisting in the delivery of these national objectives and outcomes, and the policies contained within have been developed with this in mind.

3.2.3 Strategic Transport Projects Review 2

The Second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) was published by Transport Scotland in December 2022 to help to deliver the vision, priorities and outcomes that were established in the NTS2 and to inform transport investment in Scotland until 2042. It considers the transport needs of Scotland's people and communities across various modes of transport based on the sustainable transport hierarchy.

The STPR2 has the following five key objectives, with each closely aligning and supporting Scottish Government policies and the National Transport Strategy, to:

- take climate action;
- address inequalities and accessibility;
- improve health and wellbeing;
- support sustainable economic growth; and,

- increase safety and resilience.

To deliver these objectives, STPR2 makes recommendations under six themes, regarding:

- improving active travel infrastructure;
- influencing travel choices and behaviour;
- enhancing access to affordable public transport;
- decarbonising transport;
- increasing safety and resilience on the strategic transport network; and
- strengthening strategic connections.

3.2.4 Route Map to achieve a 20% reduction in car kilometres by 2030

Scotland's Climate Change Plan Update was laid before the Scottish Parliament in December 2020 and set the target to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030. To achieve this Transport Scotland developed a framework of sustainable travel behaviours aimed at:

- reducing the need to travel, such as by using online options if goods, services and amenities cannot be accessed locally in a sustainable way;
- living well locally, by choosing local destinations that are easier to reach by more sustainable modes or that reduce distances driven if a car is still used;
- switching modes to walk, wheel, cycle or public transport; and,
- combining trips or sharing journeys with another person if car is the only feasible option.

The Transport Scotland Route Map was published in January 2022 and sets out the actions to be taken between then and 2030 to support each of these behaviours.

3.2.5 Public Health Scotland 2024 Transport Poverty Briefing

The Public Health and Sustainable Transport Partnership Group, hosted by Public Health Scotland, published a briefing in 2024 based on a literature review. It found that a lack of transport options that are available, reliable, affordable, accessible

and safe, referred to as transport poverty, creates serious health and social implications by blocking people's ability to meet their daily needs and provide a good quality of life.

3.2.6 20-Minute Neighbourhood Plan

The Scottish Government proposals set out in the 'living well locally' elements of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), and those on 20-minute neighbourhoods support the target reduction in car kilometres. The goal is to create places where residents can access most of their daily needs locally. This approach is intended to bring environmental benefits to local areas from reduced emissions by increasing the use of public transport and active travel modes. There should also be improvements in the local economy, residents' health and wellbeing from physical activity, and quality of life by creating a more attractive place to live.

3.3 Regional Context

3.3.1 Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy

The Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) is a long-term strategy that covers the combined areas of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils and sets out the direction for strategic transport improvements for the region up to 2040.

The RTS aligns with and supports the NTS2 by developing four pillars: promoting equality; reducing climate impact; delivering inclusive economic growth; and, improving well-being.

In doing so, the strategy puts forward the vision: 'to provide a safer, cleaner, more inclusive, accessible and resilient transport system in the North East, which protects the natural and built environment and contributes to healthier, more prosperous and fairer communities'.

From a passenger transport perspective, one of four rail-related outcomes set out in the RTS is for 'an enhanced and reliable local rail network' with proposed actions including upgrades to stations and working with the rail industry to increase service frequencies for stations between Inverurie and Laurencekirk.

The RTS also outlines a series of measures to improve bus services across the region to reverse the trend of declining bus patronage by improving the perceptions of bus travel, to utilise the North East of Scotland Bus Alliance and Bus Services Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs), and to deliver the actions contained within the Bus Alliance Bus Action Plan.

3.3.2 Bus Action Plan

The North East of Scotland Bus Alliance is a voluntary partnership of Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Nestrans, First Aberdeen, Stagecoach and smaller bus operators with the aim of enhancing the quality, image, and availability of bus services across the region.

The Bus Alliance Bus Action Plan aims to improve:

- journey times and reliability, by developing a BSIP agreement;
- information, marketing and promotion, by delivering improvements to bus stop information, campaigns to encourage bus usage, and engagement with the business community regarding travel planning;
- fares and ticketing, through improvements to ticketing to provide the best value to customers;
- affordability and accessibility;
- interchange, by developing the park & ride network, enhanced interchange opportunities and bus station improvements;
- bus stop infrastructure, with improvements to bus stop facilities and priority corridor infrastructure;
- the quality of the fleet, by reducing bus fleet emissions and improved accessibility of the fleet; and
- managing demand, through road space reallocation, low emission zone (LEZ) implementation, most appropriate charging regimes, car parking policies contributing to a mode shift and a review of the allocation of road space.

The Bus Action Plan also puts forward the timescales, outlines the next steps, and identifies the lead organisation to deliver these objectives along with the funding source for each.

3.3.3 Mobility Hubs

The Council is working with Nestrans and Aberdeen City Council to develop innovative transportation projects in the North East of Scotland as part of the Aberdeen City Region Deal (CRD). The CRD mobility hubs project aims to deliver a number of sites across the region to be designated as mobility hubs. These hubs will vary in scale and deliverables but will all share the theme of bringing together various sustainable transport solutions into a single site to create a connection between the transport network and the surrounding environment and allow a seamless interchange between modes.

3.3.4 Health and Transport Action Plan

The RTS makes the commitment to continue to develop a Grampian wide Health and Transport Action Plan (HTAP) that is focused around two key themes of public health and access to health. The Council is committed to the vision set out in the HTAP and to work with Nestrans, NHS Grampian and other partners to address the challenges in meeting health related transport needs whether by private car, scheduled public transport, community transport, Scottish Ambulance Service patient transport services, demand responsive transport services, taxis, or assistance from family, friends and neighbours. As part of HTAP, the Council operates the well-received THInC (Transport to Health and Social Care Information Centre) service, a phone helpline, providing advice to patients and health or social care staff on travel to appointments and making travel arrangements where appropriate.

3.3.5 Aberdeen Rapid Transit

The RTS also sets out the vision for a bus-based rapid transit system.

The Council is working with its North East of Scotland Bus Alliance partners to develop Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART), a world-class next-generation public transport system. ART is intended to provide fast, frequent and reliable services through a combination of dedicated bus lanes, off vehicle fare collection, fast and efficient boarding and alighting, and high-capacity and high-quality rapid transit vehicles.

The vision is for a cross-city network of ART routes linked to mobility hub and/or park and ride facilities, that connect people to the places they want to go with journey times competitive to the car and providing an attractive, accessible, and easy to use way to travel. Central to the concept is the delivery of complementary infrastructure improvements for other sustainable modes such as cycling and walking in a co-ordinated and holistic approach.

3.4 Local Context

3.4.1 Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy

The Council's 2012 Local Transport Strategy (LTS) is being reviewed with a view to publication of an updated strategy in 2025. In developing the new LTS, the Council prepared a series of thematic papers to garner views and opinions on key topics such as public transport, mobility hubs, Mobility as a Service (MaaS), active travel and the importance of place making. This process has allowed the Council to identify current concerns as well as likely key issues going forward. Alongside this, views were sought on the previous LTS document which, in conjunction with a critical review, has facilitated the development of revised LTS aims, objectives and actions that will be delivered over a ten-year period.

3.4.2 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan

This plan has a shared vision with the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan that by 2040 the area will be an even more attractive, prosperous, resilient, and sustainable European City Region, that is an excellent place to live, visit and do business. The Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) works to implement this vision providing further information on how the Strategic Development Plan's principles will be applied at a local level.

The plan also supports the Scottish Government's national planning objectives by encouraging high-quality development and was prepared in line with the Scottish Government's declaration of a Climate Emergency and Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019.

The LDP will have significant impacts on Aberdeenshire by:

- promoting sustainable mixed communities with the highest standards of design;
- taking on the challenges of sustainable development and climate change;

- protecting and improving assets and resources;
- increasing and diversifying the economy;
- protecting, enhancing, and promoting natural and semi-natural features within and between settlements; and,
- making efficient use of the transport network and promoting active travel.

The policies set out in this PTS will help to deliver these desired LDP outcomes.

4 Passenger Transport Delivery Context

Bus services in Aberdeenshire operate in a deregulated market with commercial bus operators providing most bus journeys and the Council, subject to the availability of funding, supporting socially necessary bus services/journeys where deemed necessary.

In 2023 approximately 84% of bus miles in Aberdeenshire were operated on a commercial basis with approximately 16% of bus miles supported by the Council.

Supported local bus services in Aberdeenshire have been impacted first by funding constraints leading to some service reductions in 2019 and 2023, by the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on bus operator income due to changes in travel behaviour, and more recently by exceptional transport cost inflation affecting driver pay rates, fuel, energy, and interest rates. These factors have also affected the commercial bus network. Nationally bus operators have revised parts of the network to restore viability, and in Aberdeenshire this led to a reduction in the frequency of bus journeys on mainline services into Aberdeen.

4.1 Overview of Bus Services

The principal operator of local bus services in Aberdeenshire is Stagecoach which, as of November 2024, operated 50 services which were a mix of commercial routes and services financially supported by the Council. Watermill Coaches were the second largest provider of services, running a total of 12 supported or mainly supported services. Other operators with a smaller presence were:

- Bains Coaches, operating one supported combined local bus/school transport service;
- Deveron Coaches, operating one commercial service and five supported combined local bus/school transport services;
- Ember Coaches, operating a long distance commercial service from Aberdeen to Edinburgh that stops in Aberdeenshire;
- Kininmonth Cabs, operating a supported demand responsive transport service;

- Premier Coaches, operating one partially supported service and one supported combined local bus/school transport service;
- Shorts Travel, operating one supported local bus service; and,
- Smith & Sons Coaches, operating two supported combined local bus/school transport services.

Aberdeenshire Council also operates, under Section 19 Permits that restrict who can travel, a network of rural and town in-house A2B dial-a-bus minibus services that mainly serve older people but can be used by anyone if there is no other suitable local bus service in the area. None of the community transport (CT) providers in Aberdeenshire operate local bus services.

4.2 Bus Service Patronage

Figure 4-1 below shows annual patronage on Aberdeenshire’s supported local bus services and in-house dial-a-bus services for each of the financial years from 2017-18 to 2023-24.

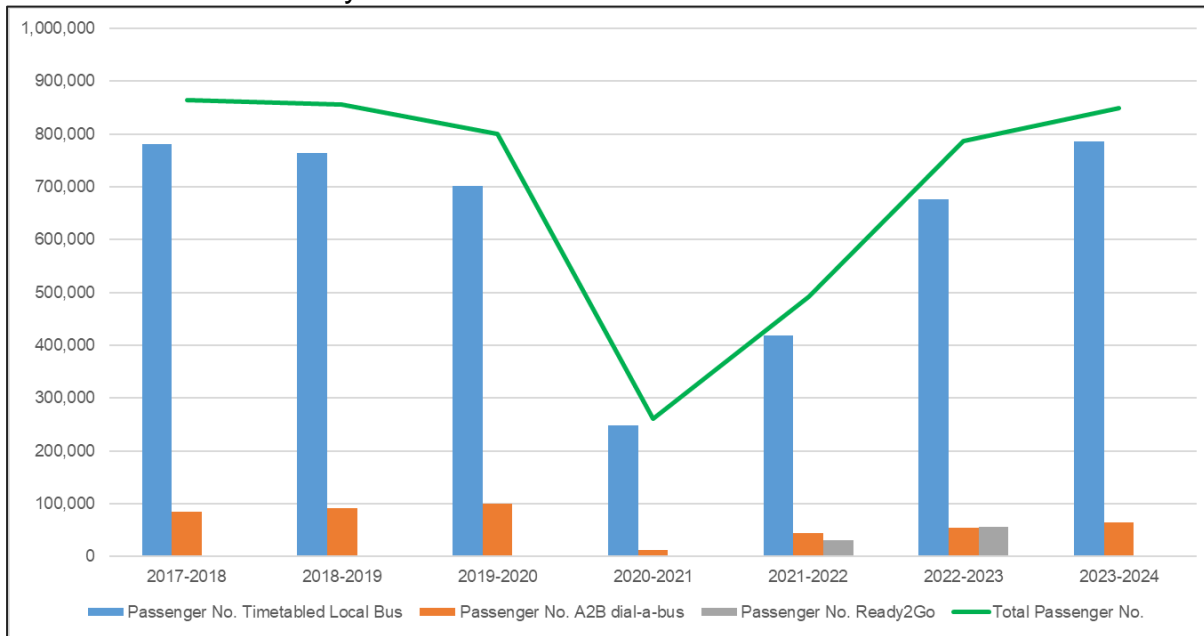


Figure 4-1 Financial Year Supported Service Passenger Numbers

The graph portrayed in Figure 4-1 shows that between 2017-18 and 2019-20 there was a steady decline in passengers with a reduction of 7% over this period. This included a fall of 10% in bus passengers on local timetabled services, whereas over the same period passengers using demand responsive transport (DRT) services increased by 19%.¹

Following 2019-20 passenger numbers were significantly impacted by lockdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in total patronage falling by 67% in 2020-21. COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns continued to impact Aberdeenshire's local bus services in 2021-22 but there was a recovery of 88% from the previous year which was partly due to the impact of the Ready2Go Around Inverurie digital demand responsive transport (DRT) service which was introduced in August 2021.

In 2023-24 the recovery continued, extending the upwards trend observed since the pandemic. Overall, across the seven-year period from 2017-18 to 2023-24 there was a reduction in the total number of passenger journeys on supported services of only 2%. It is noteworthy that there was an increase of 6% in total passengers in 2023-24 compared with the pre-COVID baseline year 2019-2020.

Concessionary passenger journeys on local bus services in Scotland decreased steadily in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, although concessionary journeys as a proportion of total journeys had been rising. Nationally, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant reduction in the number of concessionary journeys from 137 million in 2019-20 to only 48 million in 2020-21, a fall of 65% year on year. However, in 2022-23 there was a substantial increase to 146 million journeys, largely due to the Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Travel being introduced on 31 January 2022. Consequently, the proportion of concessionary passengers accounted for almost half of local bus service journeys (49% in 2022-23) in Scotland.² In 2023, 76% of passenger journeys made on Aberdeenshire supported bus services were concessionary comprising 35% young persons, 30% older persons and 11% disabled persons.

¹ This includes A2B dial-a-bus services registered as a local bus service and those operated by Council minibuses.

² Chapter 2 - Bus and coach travel | Transport Scotland (Table 2.2a)

4.3 Bus Service Costs

Error! Reference source not found.2 details the Council’s spend on ‘public’ bus services over the last seven financial years, excluding those related to Council support staff, management software and other overheads.

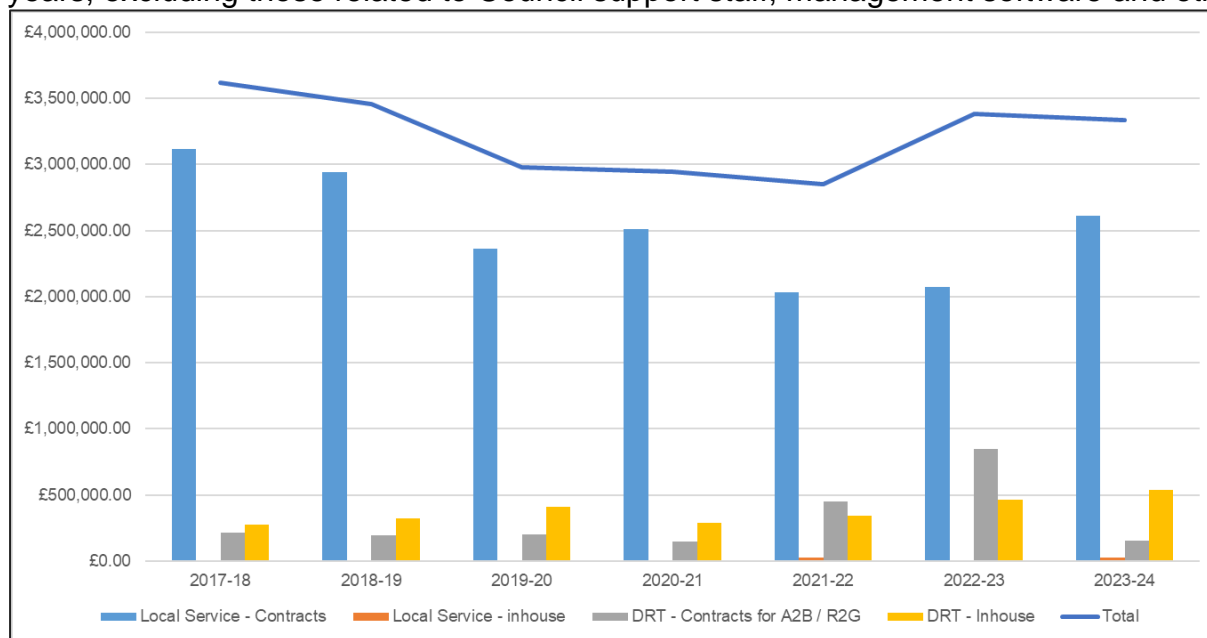


Figure 4-2 Supported Service Costs by Financial Year

The graph portrayed in Figure 4-2 shows that the Council’s support costs for timetabled local service contracts reduced by around 16% from £3.1m in 2017-18 to £2.6m in 2023-24. This was associated with the withdrawal or reduction of some services/journeys and the introduction of new A2B dial-a-bus and Ready2Go Around Inverurie demand responsive transport (DRT) services, replacing timetabled services. This also caused DRT contract costs to fluctuate over the period, with support costs for in-house DRT services rising by over 90% from 2017-18 to 2023-24.

Total support costs for the Council reduced by 8% from £3.6m in 2017-18 to £3.3m in 2023-24 in cash terms. In real terms, this represents a reduction of approximately 25%. This significant fall in funding services is also reflected across Scotland where, in real terms, local authority bus support has reduced by 15% over the same period.³

Table 4-1 illustrates the average costs to the Council per passenger journey for all ‘public’ bus services including DRT from financial year 2017-18 to 2023-24 showing an overall fall of 15%. The highest costs per passenger were in 2020-21 when passenger numbers fell due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

| | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total Costs | £3,336,004 | £3,134,452 | £2,566,564 | £2,659,202 | £2,502,316 | £2,920,064 | £2,766,159 |
| Number of Passengers | 900,316 | 885,009 | 820,500 | 302,643 | 507,565 | 746,041 | 801,352 |
| Cost per Passenger Journey | £3.71 | £3.54 | £3.13 | £8.79 | £4.93 | £3.91 | £3.45 |

Table 4-1 Cost per passenger journey for supported local services and DRT (excluding in-house A2B) £ nominal

4.4 Mileage

The total mileage for all timetabled bus services in Aberdeenshire in 2019-20, before the COVID-19 Pandemic, was just under 7.1 million with 21.5% (1.5 million) of these miles being subsidised and 78.5% commercially operated. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, by financial year 2023-24 the total mileage in Aberdeenshire had not fully recovered as the overall figure was 6.9 million miles, approximately 2% lower than pre pandemic. In 2023-23 there were approximately 1.1 million subsidised miles operated which made up just 16% of the overall mileage.

³ Chapter 2 - Bus and coach travel | Transport Scotland

4.5 Coach Travel

Coach travel, which is a competitor of the rail industry, has increased across Scotland partly due to the introduction of free travel for young people but there are limited opportunities to use such services in Aberdeenshire. The M96 express coach service between Aberdeen and Inverness only serves Thainstone (on A96 near Inverurie), Blackburn and Huntly. Travelling southbound from Aberdeen, frequent coaches operate to Edinburgh and Glasgow, but none served Aberdeenshire until October 2024 when a service was introduced between Aberdeen and Edinburgh stopping on the A90 at Portlethen, Newtonhill, Drumlithie and Fordoun.

4.6 Community Transport

Several parts of Aberdeenshire are served by community transport (CT) operators or the voluntary sector who provide services such as dial-a-bus, group minibus hires and volunteer car schemes, but the availability and scale of such services varies from place to place. Since 2008 the Council has consistently provided approximately £400,000 annual grant fund to community transport providers.

4.7 Client Transport

In 2024 there were circa 750 school transport services carrying approximately 10,000 pupils, both mainstream and Additional Support Needs (ASN), and 55 adult social work services catering for approximately 160 people. The Council provides client transport either by contracting in external suppliers or operating services in-house using a fleet of approximately 60 minibuses. The total expenditure on school transport for the year 2018-2019 amounted to £17,839,770 rising to £22,883,685 in 2023-24, which represents 8.5 times the amount spent on supporting timetabled and demand responsive bus services. The spend on adult social work transport procured by the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) was £1,274,760 in 2018-19 and fell to £977,430 in 2023-24.⁴

⁴ During this period there was a partial shift towards some local social work staff procuring transport direct rather than through the PTU.

5 Connectivity Analysis

The Council is producing Place Plans in accordance with its Place Strategy which is founded on the Place Principle agreed by Scottish Government and COSLA and incorporating 13 Place and Wellbeing Outcomes including “everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate and safe public transport service”. Connectivity will therefore feature in the development of these plans serving rural areas and towns and initially focussing on the catchment areas of Aberdeenshire Academies.

5.1 Network Connectivity

To inform the strategy, the level of connectivity provided by the fixed route timetabled bus network across Aberdeenshire has been analysed, details of which are published in the Supplementary Paper 1: Network Connectivity. This analysis which reflected the situation in the first quarter of 2024 is based on the 62 ‘localities’ in Aberdeenshire as defined by National Records of Scotland (places with more than 500 residents). In 2020, these localities accounted for an estimated 188,130 people, implying that around 25% of Aberdeenshire residents live in places with fewer than 500 residents. This is a high proportion and underlines the rural nature of Aberdeenshire with a quarter of the population living in small villages or dispersed across rural Aberdeenshire.

One key aspect of connectivity, especially for rural areas, is access from each locality to a significant ‘service centre’. The Scottish Government defines a town of more than 10,000 people as one which is of value to people who live in smaller places to access so these are considered to be service centres. The service centres with a population of greater than 10,000 in Aberdeenshire are Peterhead, Inverurie, Fraserburgh, Westhill, Stonehaven and Ellon. Other smaller towns which act as sub-regional centres include Banff/Macduff (7,830 combined), Banchory (7,440), Turriff (4,960) and Huntly (4,550).

Except for Gardenstown and Kingseat, every locality in Aberdeenshire is connected to a town or city centre by a weekday (Monday to Friday) scheduled bus service albeit the frequency of services and range of connectivity provided varies widely.

The timetabled bus network is primarily focussed on radial corridors to/from Aberdeen with the A92 Stonehaven and the A90 Ellon corridors seeing the highest volume of buses overall. Links between the bigger towns in Aberdeenshire are more limited when not on the same main corridor, and it is notable that Banff/Macduff is not well connected to Fraserburgh or

Peterhead. Generally connections are more limited beyond and between the main corridors and therefore car journeys will account for most of such travel. Many localities in Aberdeenshire do not have direct access to Aberdeen, and thus passengers are required to change buses to get to the main regional centre. These less well-connected localities are typically off the main corridors.

Fully commercial services are focussed on the main radial corridors to/from Aberdeen and serve Aberdeenshire's bigger centres of population. Nearly all services in and around Peterhead and Fraserburgh are also provided commercially although there is no commercial service between Banff/Macduff and Fraserburgh. Despite such extensive commercial provision many localities in rural Aberdeenshire would receive no scheduled bus service at all without the presence of Council supported services.

There are few services which provide links between corridors, e.g., between the A96 and A90N and these are all supported by the Council. Partly subsidised services operate along Deeside, between Fraserburgh and Banff / Macduff and north out of Inverurie, some of which overlap to some degree with commercial services. Fully subsidised services provide limited connections across central Aberdeenshire including between Inverurie and Ellon, connect Laurencekirk to Stonehaven and provide local connections to/from Banff/Macduff.

Supplementary Paper 1 also details the results of a local connectivity analysis, illustrating a series of sub-regional mini networks linking localities to the bigger towns, where these localities are not on a main bus corridor. Those localities which sit on a main route between bigger towns are served much better than those located off the main corridors. Inverurie, Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh are the main 'hubs' for the bus services which operate wholly within Aberdeenshire, with town services also operating in Peterhead, Inverurie and Fraserburgh.

5.2 Community/Locality Connectivity

Table 5-1 outlines the connectivity provided by the timetabled bus services that are available in each Aberdeenshire locality (over 500 population), in descending order of size, for travel to its nearest 'service centre' or 'service centres'. The service centres are a settlement with a population of over 10,000 people, including Aberdeen, and towns outside Aberdeenshire are also included where appropriate. In the case of Deeside, Banchory is included as a service centre despite having a population of less than 10,000. In the central Buchan area, Mintlaw is also included in the analysis as it provides a main interchange with services to Aberdeen, Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

The table includes details of:

- 'Operating Days', i.e. how many days per week the bus service between the locality and service centre operates;
- 'Buses per Weekday to a Service Centre', i.e. how many buses operate per weekday, one-way, from the locality to a service centre; and,
- during 'Weekdays', 'Saturdays' and 'Sundays', whether buses operate at the following times of day from the locality to the service centre -
 - working day (0900-1700 hours), i.e. if it is possible to arrive at the service centre by 0900 hours and depart after 1700 hours by bus, enabling a resident of that locality to achieve a conventional working day in the service centre,
 - part day, i.e. if it is possible to travel by bus from the locality to the service centre at regular intervals and return at convenient times of the day, enabling attendance at an appointment, make a shopping trip, etc., without an excessive wait for a return bus, and,
 - full evening (after 2200 hours), i.e. if it is possible to return from the service centre after 2200 hours, enabling access to the evening economy in that town or Aberdeen.

Table 5-1 Connectivity of Aberdeenshire Localities (as of Q1 2024)

| Locality | Service Centre or Town (ST) | Operating Days | Buses per Weekday to ST | Weekday | | | Saturday | | | Sunday | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) |
| Peterhead (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 32 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Inverurie (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 30 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Fraserburgh (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 23 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Westhill (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 40 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

| Locality | Service Centre or Town (ST) | Operating Days Buses per Weekday to ST | | Weekday | | | Saturday | | | Sunday | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---|----|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) |
| Stonehaven (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 37 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Ellon (10k+ pop) | Aberdeen | 7 | 51 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Portlethen | Aberdeen | 7 | 42 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Banchory | Aberdeen | 7 | 29 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Turriff | Aberdeen | 7 | 22 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Huntly | Inverurie | 7 | 23 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Kintore | Inverurie | 7. | 21 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Banff | Fraserburgh | M-F | 2 | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| | Elgin | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Macduff | Elgin | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| | Fraserburgh | M-F | 2 | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Kemnay | Inverurie | M-Sa | 19 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Newtonhill | Stonehaven | 7 | 9 | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No |
| Oldmeldrum | Inverurie | M-Sa | 17 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Blackburn | Aberdeen | 7 | 35 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Laurencekirk | Montrose | M-Sa | 6 | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Aboyne | Banchory | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Mintlaw | Peterhead | 7 | 11 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Insch | Inverurie | M-Sa | 10 | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Balmedie | Aberdeen | 7 | 36 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Alford | Inverurie | M-Sa | 7 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |

| Locality | Service Centre or Town (ST) | Operating Days Buses per Weekday to ST | | Weekday | | | Saturday | | | Sunday | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|----------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) |
| Newmachar | Aberdeen | 7 | 25 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Inverbervie | Stonehaven | 7 | 26 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Portsoy | Elgin | 7 | 16 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Cruden Bay | Peterhead | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Newburgh | Ellon | 7 | 7 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Ballater | Banchory | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Pitmedden | Aberdeen | 7 | 17 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| | Ellon | M-Sa | 6 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Torphins | Banchory | 7 | 11 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Inverallochy and Cairnbulg | Fraserburgh | 7 | 9 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Rosehearty | Fraserburgh | 7 | 14 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Boddam | Peterhead | M-Sa | 18 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| Aberchirder | Huntly | M-F | 6 | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| New Pitsligo | Fraserburgh | M-F | 6 | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Mintlaw | M-Sa* | Varies * | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| St Cyrus | Montrose | 7 | 23 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Rothienorman | Inverurie | M-Sa | 3 | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Tarves | Aberdeen | 7 | 17 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| | Ellon | M-Sa | 2 | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Longside | Peterhead | 7 | 11 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |

| Locality | Service Centre or Town (ST) | Operating Days Buses per Weekday to ST | | Weekday | | | Saturday | | | Sunday | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) |
| Whitehills | Fraserburgh | N/A** | N/A** | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Elgin | 7 | 17 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Strichen | Fraserburgh | 7 | 15 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| | Mintlaw | 7* | Varies* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Drumoak | Banchory | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Maud | Peterhead | 7 | 2 | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| | Ellon | 7 | N/A** | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Mintlaw | 7* | Varies* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Hatton of Cruden | Ellon | 7 | 18 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Crimond | Peterhead | 7 | 19 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Potterton | Aberdeen | 7 | 10 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Gourdon | Montrose | 7 | 23 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Sandhaven | Fraserburgh | 7 | 14 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Stuartfield | Peterhead | 7 | 8 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| | Mintlaw | 7* | Varies* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Braemar | Banchory | 7 | 11 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| St Fergus | Peterhead | 7 | 19 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Kingseat | Inverurie | N/A** | N/A** | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Tarland | Banchory | M-F | 1 | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |

| Locality | Service Centre or Town (ST) | Operating Days Buses per Weekday to ST | | Weekday | | | Saturday | | | Sunday | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|---------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| | | | | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) | working day (0900-1700) | part day | full evening (after 2200) |
| St Combs | Fraserburgh | 7 | 9 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| Johnshaven | Montrose | 7 | 23 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| New Deer | Inverurie | M-Sa* | 2 | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| New Deer | Ellon | N/A** | N/A** | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Mintlaw | M-Sa* | Varies* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Marywell | Aberdeen | 7 | 34 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Gardenstown | Fraserburgh | Sa | 0 | No | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| Cuminstown | Inverurie | M-Sa | 2 | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| | Ellon | N/A** | 0 | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Auchenblae | Stonehaven | M-F | 8 | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Methlick | Aberdeen | 7 | 17 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| | Ellon | M-Sa | 2 | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Lumphanan | Banchory | M-F | 1 | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |

*The connectivity service levels are based on all timetabled bus services and the Central Buchan A2B dial-a-bus service.
** N/A indicates that there is no feasible bus link, e.g., there is no bus service or only a weekly shopper service

Most localities are connected to service centres in Aberdeenshire or in neighbouring local authorities to varying degrees. Some 11 localities have 'full' access across the week, i.e., residents of these localities could reasonably use the bus for most, or all, trips to a service centre.

There are 'gaps' in locality connectivity across Aberdeenshire and the scale of these clearly increases as the population of the locality decreases. Whilst only three localities do not have weekday working day access to a 10,000+ settlement, 31

localities do not have late evening weekday access to/from a service centre (with slightly more localities with no Saturday access). Connectivity also drops off significantly on a Sunday.

This information on locality connectivity provides a baseline against which to focus development of passenger transport services in Aberdeenshire.

5.3 Connectivity to the Regional Centre

Aberdeen, as the key regional centre, is well connected to and from Aberdeenshire by bus and is a large draw for employment, retail, healthcare and education.

The maps in figures 5-1 and 5-2 show regional connectivity from Aberdeenshire to Foresterhill Health Campus, the principal regional health facility, and to all employment locations across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, respectively. The analysis includes both timetabled bus services and train services.⁵

⁵ This 'Hansen' analysis combines travel times to each 'datazone' with the number of jobs in each (BRES data). A distance decay function is used such that jobs further away are 'worth' less. A total value is summed for all origin zones. The number of jobs is based on BRES data - Business Register and Employment Survey - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/businessregisterandemploymentsurvey>

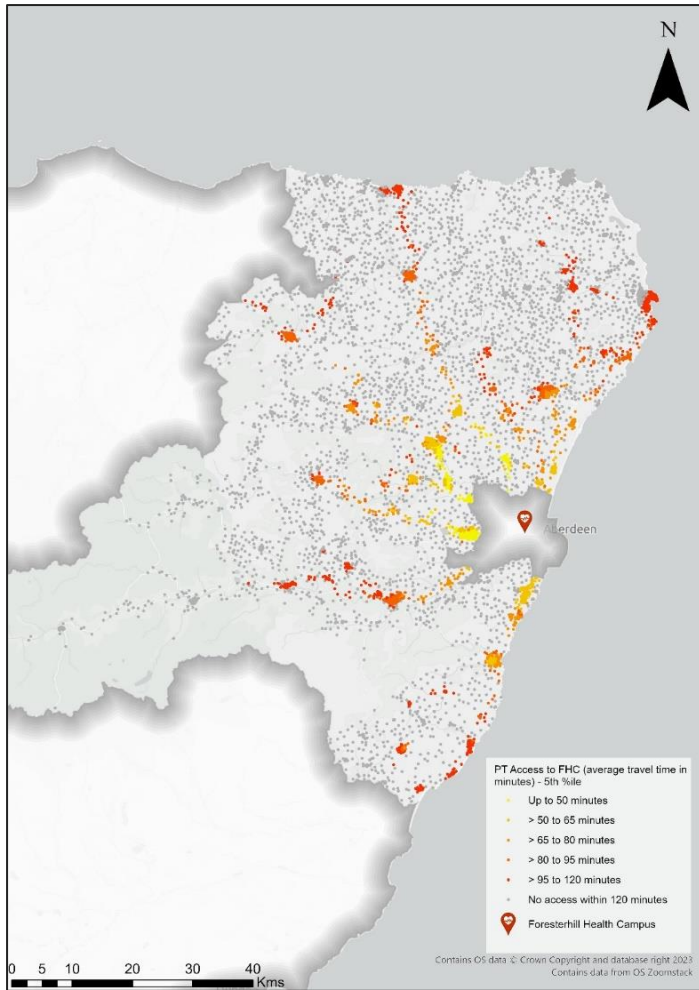


Figure 5-1 Heatmap of Weekday Public Transport Access to Foresterhill Health Campus

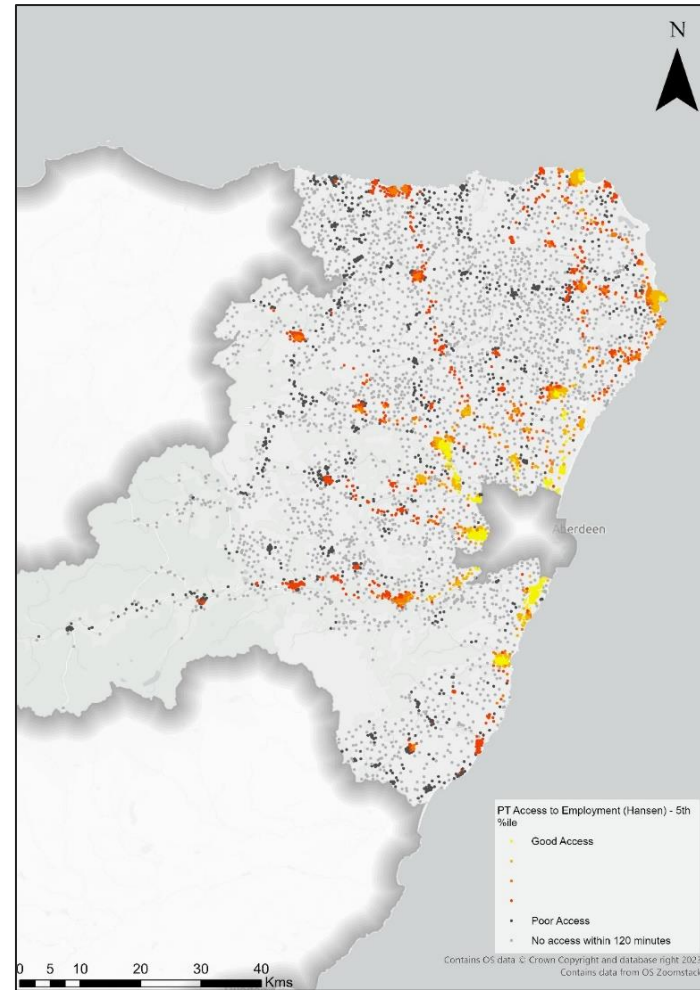


Figure 5-2 Heatmap of Weekday Relative Public Transport Access to Employment

Figure 5-1 is a map of Aberdeenshire with dots indicating postcodes. It depicts public transport travel time to Foresterhill Health Campus in Aberdeen. It highlights how travel times to this key regional health facility increase sharply only a short distance beyond Aberdeen.

Figure 5-2 is a map of Aberdeenshire with dots indicating postcodes. It indicates the length of travel time by public transport to access work opportunities. It illustrates, as would be expected, that those postcodes with the best access to jobs are those closest to Aberdeen, followed by those in Aberdeenshire's bigger towns and therefore sub-regional employment centres.

The impact of the faster journey times provided by rail is evident from the connectivity distributions in both figures 5-1 and 5-2. Both maps show the worst connected areas in dark grey - away from the main corridors and settlements, whilst the light grey dots indicate postcodes with no public transport connectivity or no effective public transport. The analysis does not take into account the door-to-door Central Buchan A2B demand responsive bus service.

5.4 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the existing local bus network and an analysis of the connectivity provided to all of Aberdeenshire's localities by timetabled public transport services. Much of the population of Aberdeenshire lives in rural areas, with around a quarter living in villages with a population of fewer than 500 people or across the rural hinterland.

Fixed route timetabled bus services in Aberdeenshire are largely focused on the radial corridors to and from Aberdeen, whilst there are several localities with no direct bus connection to Aberdeen. For bus services operating wholly within Aberdeenshire, Inverurie, Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh act as key sub-regional hubs and function as connection points to Aberdeen and further afield. A high proportion of services/journeys running wholly within Aberdeenshire are partly or entirely supported, with many of these routes serving localities with smaller populations which would otherwise not be served.

Generally, smaller rural localities in Aberdeenshire have poorer access to fixed route timetabled bus services, unless they are located along a key bus corridor which runs between larger settlements. This access to public transport services correlates with access to key activities and facilities, for example, access to both employment and healthcare.

The provision of bus services is likely to have an impact on the local population's perception towards public transport and will have an impact on their probability of travelling by bus. Chapter 6 explores in more detail the views and perceptions of passenger transport by the public in Aberdeenshire.

6 Use and Views of the Aberdeenshire Public

6.1 Survey Approach

To inform the strategy, guide prioritisation of service improvements in the medium term and better understand public perceptions of passenger transport in Aberdeenshire, primary research was undertaken in February 2024 aimed at a representative sample of the Aberdeenshire public (in terms of geographical spread, gender and age), with a further broad 50/50 split between bus users (defined as people who have used a bus in the last three months) and those who do not use the bus.

6.2 Bus Use

Regarding those identified as bus users:

- 40% use the bus at least once a week, and,
- around 25% use the bus 2-3 times per week.

In terms of trip purpose:

- the three main travel purposes reported were Shopping (53% of respondents), Social (50%) and Visiting Friends and Family (30%); whilst,
- 19% of bus users said they use the bus to commute to work.

6.3 Bus User Views

Bus user satisfaction with various different aspects of bus travel was ascertained, with full details of the results available in the Supplementary Paper 2: Views of the Aberdeenshire Public.

Bus users stated they were most satisfied with: proximity to a bus stop (74% 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'); personal security (73%); and, the amount of time available at a destination (73%).

Amongst bus users there is however significant dissatisfaction with several aspects of bus services including: the level of service cancellations (39% 'very dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied'); reliability of buses running to timetable (34%); time of last bus home (33%); service frequency (30%); lack of permanence of services (30%); and, cost of bus travel (29%).

Around 50% of bus users indicated (37% yes, 12% maybe) that the bus services as currently delivered do or may stop them travelling by bus more often, suggesting there is a suppressed demand for bus travel and therefore an appetite amongst bus users to use the bus more often. These respondents were asked which aspects of bus services stop them travelling by bus more often, whether there were major or minor reasons for this, and the consequences to them.

The top six 'major reasons' for bus users not using the bus more often are:

- cost of bus travel (47%);
- number / frequency of bus services near where I live (45%);
- reliability of services running to timetable (39%);
- time of last / only bus back home (37%);
- the level of service cancellations (36%); and,
- bus services not going where I want to go (34%).

This has a range of consequences for bus users who indicated that, should these issues be addressed, they would make more trips by bus, with around half saying they would make at least two to three additional return trips per week by bus. This appetite for increased bus travel amongst existing bus users, which would allow them to reduce their car use and/or take up a range of life-enhancing opportunities, is a key issue for the strategy.

6.4 Non-Bus User Views

Those who indicated that they did not use the bus were asked if there was a bus stop which they could walk to near their home and around two-thirds said there was. Those who considered they had convenient access to a bus stop were then asked if they would use a bus service were one available to them, and around 60% said 'yes' or 'perhaps' again suggesting a desire by some people to use the bus.

Those non-bus users with access to a bus stop were asked if there were aspects of their bus services that stopped them using the bus, and around half indicated that there were. They were asked to consider whether the reasons for not using the bus were major or minor.

The top six 'major reasons' given were:

- number / frequency of bus services near where I live (72%);
- reliability of services running to timetable (57%);
- the level of service cancellations (51%);
- time of last / only bus home (51%);
- bus services not going where I want to go (48%); and,
- how long the journey by bus takes (44%).

These detrimental factors are similar to those cited by bus users, with the addition of 'long journey times' cited by 80% of non-bus users as either a 'major' or 'minor' reason for not using the bus. It is noteworthy that the top reason for bus users not using the bus more was the cost of travel, but this did not feature in the top six reasons for non-users not travelling by bus.

The research indicated that not being able to use the bus also has a range of consequences for non-bus users, which are similar to the consequences for bus users not being able to use the bus more often. It is clear that car ownership and use is increased, and people are missing out on a range of life enhancing opportunities.

Non-bus users also indicated that, should these issues be addressed, they would indeed make trips by bus, with over half saying they would make at least two to three return trips per week by bus. This suggests that there is an appetite for bus travel amongst people who currently do not use the bus, allowing them to reduce their car use and/or take up a range of opportunities.

6.5 Summary

The research has highlighted a wide range of factors which inhibit or prevent people from using the bus. It suggests there is an appetite for increased bus use and therefore a latent demand from both bus users and non-bus users for bus travel which could be realised with improvements to various aspects of the bus network.

The key factors identified surround issues associated with network coverage (i.e., having access to a service which meets your needs) and length of operating day, reflecting the connectivity analysis set out in Chapter 5, together with service reliability both in terms of punctuality and service cancellations.

Perceptions of bus services greatly impact passenger numbers and whilst there is generally a fairly positive perception of bus services in Aberdeenshire, the aspects which are causing dissatisfaction, such as service reliability and network coverage create a significant challenge in attracting patronage and improving the network. By addressing these challenges and tailoring the network to cater better for travel needs there is an opportunity to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of public transport in Aberdeenshire, help to retain existing bus users and attract new users who may currently travel by alternative modes such as private car. In doing so, there is the potential to allow people to reduce their car use and/or take up life changing opportunities.

Chapter 8 sets out in more detail the challenges and opportunities of the passenger transport network in Aberdeenshire.

7 Value of Supported Passenger Transport Services

7.1 Introduction

The provision of passenger transport services creates positive value for the local economy, environment, and society. Bus services help to improve access to town and city centres, supporting employment opportunities for individuals as an example. They are important in rural areas where active travel options such as walking and cycling are less practical. They also have environmental benefits by helping to reduce pollution by reducing the level of private car use. Socially, the existence of passenger transport services increases the accessibility of non-car users to social and recreational opportunities and helps to tackle issues around deprivation and health.

At a local level, passenger transport provision supports all three of the Council's Strategic Priorities. It directly helps to deliver the Strategic Priority 'A Sustainable Economy' by attracting and retaining people of working age to the region and indirectly helps to support new and existing businesses to thrive and provide fair work opportunities. It directly helps deliver the Strategic Priority 'Living Well Locally' by improving the life chances of people at risk of falling into poverty, or those already living in poverty and indirectly helps people to lead independent lives through prevention and early intervention, providing care and support to those most in need. It indirectly helps to encourage and promote active travel supporting healthier, more sustainable and environmentally friendly travel options under the Strategic Priority 'Connected Communities' and the strategy's action plan directly helps by seeking to collaborate with partners and communities to attract investment to enhance travel and transport connections between towns and villages.

This chapter sets out some of the main benefits of supported bus services and therefore why continuing to fund these services is essential to the communities affected. It is also intended to assist when making the case to external funders for investment in public transport.

7.2 Economic Value

The key economic benefits resulting from passenger transport arise from improving connectivity that gives businesses a greater pool of workers to choose from, resulting in productivity improvements from the potential of a higher skilled workforce, and the creation of a larger consumer base as more people are able to access town centres leading to higher

business revenues. This is especially important following the COVID-19 pandemic, to facilitate the return of consumer footfall to previous levels. Bus services deliver significant economic value, with every £1 of public funding spent on a typical package of bus measures generating an estimated £4.55 in economic benefit, and likely greater benefits accrued with targeted interventions.⁶

7.2.1 Employment

Passenger transport services are a significant factor in the Aberdeenshire economy as they provide essential access for workers and job seekers to employment opportunities, as well as apprenticeships which are a key part of addressing youth employment. Even though passenger numbers continue to recover, travel patterns (and especially travel to work commuting patterns) have changed significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic and bus services need to cater for this, especially for those who have returned to their place of employment.

The employment benefits related to the bus are significant. It has been reported that at the UK level, 400,000 workers are in a more productive job due to the bus, leading to an annual economic output of £400m. Also, over 50% of businesses consider the bus network to have an important role in the recruitment and retention of employees.⁷ The employment benefits will likely most impact those on lower incomes without access to a car, therefore their access to jobs will rely heavily upon the cost and accessibility of public transport services. This is especially true for young people and disabled people who both have access to free bus travel through the National Entitlement Card.

Finally, the transport industry is a significant employer in its own right.

7.2.2 Consumer Spending

Passenger transport services enable consumers to access the services and goods that businesses provide. In the UK, buses are the primary mode of access to city centres, and they help to contribute £21bn in city centre expenditure to the

⁶ KPMG (for CPT) – The economic impact of local bus services ([KPMG \(cpt-uk.org\)](https://www.kpmg.com/au/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/2017/06/17-the-economic-impact-of-local-bus-services))

⁷ UTG – Bus Sector Benefits report [WEB.pdf \(urbantransportgroup.org\)](https://www.urbantransportgroup.org)

economy each year.⁸ Additionally, outside of major urban areas, buses are an important mode of bringing people into towns and villages contributing to over £27bn in retail and leisure spending.⁹ It has been calculated that UK bus passengers spend £1 in every £10 spent on the High Street contributing a total of almost £40bn every year to local economies, and on average bus passengers spend £32 per return journey at their destination, e.g. in shops or other facilities.¹⁰

7.3 Environmental Value

The use of passenger transport services yields positive environmental impacts by reducing the overall volume of vehicle movements, leading to cleaner air from reduced vehicle emissions. There will also be a reduction in noise pollution, making communities more pleasant. These benefits are enhanced where traffic levels were high as any reduction in congestion allows traffic to flow more freely and delivers benefits from lower vehicle emissions.

In 2022 40.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions were released in Scotland which was a 2.4% increase from 2020.¹¹ Domestic transport emissions were the largest contributor to this increase. Public transport plays a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of climate change by emitting far fewer greenhouse gases per person compared to that of private cars.

The reduction in vehicle emissions will also result in a healthier population with fewer respiratory, cardiovascular and other health issues linked to local air quality. This mitigates the economic and social disbenefits of a less productive workforce, which would negatively affect life satisfaction and well-being.

7.4 Social Value

The key social benefits resulting from passenger transport are improved connectivity and inclusion, reduced deprivation, and improvements to individuals' health and wellbeing.

⁸ CPT-Bus-Facts.pdf (bususers.org)

⁹ KPMG (for CPT) – The economic impact of local bus services ([KPMG \(cpt-uk.org\)](https://www.kpmg.com/au/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/2017/05/01/the-economic-impact-of-local-bus-services))

¹⁰ KPMG (for CPT) – The economic impact of local bus services ([KPMG \(cpt-uk.org\)](https://www.kpmg.com/au/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/2017/05/01/the-economic-impact-of-local-bus-services))

¹¹ [Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2022/04/Scottish-Greenhouse-Gas-Statistics-2022.pdf)

7.4.1 Inclusion

The level of social inclusion experienced by many individuals is strongly linked to the accessibility provided by passenger transport services, a relationship highlighted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly where walking or cycling is not a viable option. To support social inclusion, bus services play a vital role in accessing activities and facilities for those who are most vulnerable in society and can help address transport poverty.

Personal safety on evening services is especially important for those who identify as female or non-binary, young LGBT passengers, or those who have disabilities, as these groups are less likely to indicate that they feel safe using the bus at night. Providing these groups with the feeling of security on the bus network is key to ensure passenger services are suitable for them. For those with disabilities the provision of suitably accessible vehicles and infrastructure can be crucial.

Public transport also acts as a facilitator for encouraging social interactions and increasing a sense of community and place, contributing towards mental and physical health benefits, especially for those who may feel excluded from society.

7.4.2 Deprivation

Bus services are often relied upon most by those on lower incomes or who reside in the more deprived areas, whereas those on higher incomes are more likely to use the private car or train where available. Therefore, affordable bus services have a significant impact on reducing deprivation and transport poverty. For some people they provide the only means of access to employment, education, healthcare, and less expensive goods and services, thus dramatically improving the opportunities for low-income families. In rural parts of Aberdeenshire, 'deprivation' tends to be spread across the area which can mean it is somewhat hidden in terms of official statistics.

Reducing levels of deprivation will provide economic benefits with increased incomes and living standards. This is also an effective way of encouraging greater levels of economic growth as those on lower incomes tend to have a higher marginal propensity to consume and will therefore spend a higher proportion of their disposable income, leading to a greater multiplier effect on the rest of the economy.

7.4.3 Health and Wellbeing

Passenger transport services play a vital role in ensuring that residents across Aberdeenshire have access to necessary healthcare facilities as well as services and facilities to support healthy lifestyles. This is especially important for older people who are more likely to visit hospitals, medical practices, and pharmacies, and with approximately 22% of Aberdeenshire's population being over 65 years old and a growing demographic, this makes it a key issue for the region.¹² The Council seeks to help people lead independent lives through prevention and early intervention, in support of the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership's Strategic Plan. Enhancing transport connectivity can reduce the journey time required and improve accessibility to healthcare and other facilities that can encourage and promote healthy lifestyles, which will positively impact individuals' wellbeing.

Public transport will also contribute to greater levels of active travel by increasing walking and cycling levels to/from bus stops, instead of using the private car. This increase in active travel is associated with a reduction in the severity of health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and depression.

Bus services contribute to mental and physical health benefits by increasing the accessibility of social spaces within the community, resulting in a reduced sense of loneliness for individuals.

Transport poverty, which is the lack of adequate transport services necessary to access general services or the inability to pay for transport services, is a large contributor towards poor health. This is because it reduces access to health and care services, and also limits work, training, and community engagement opportunities which are fundamental to physical and mental health wellbeing.

7.5 Summary

Bus services form a key component of the Aberdeenshire passenger transport network with buses the most used form of public transport. Bus journeys undertaken create positive economic and social value to passengers, communities and wider society. It has been estimated that investing in bus services generates significant economic value particularly with targeted interventions. The specific contribution that bus services bring to town centres is also noteworthy.

¹² National Records of Scotland (2023), National Records for Scotland mid-year population update 2023 (nrscotland.gov.uk)

8 Challenges and Opportunities

8.1 Introduction

There are many challenges facing the provision of public transport services in Aberdeenshire, some specific to the area and some that reflect national and/or global issues and trends. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath have had a material effect on the public transport market with long term implications for both demand and supply.

As outlined in Chapter 6 there are several challenges arising from public dissatisfaction with various aspects of bus services in Aberdeenshire, such as perceptions towards reliability, coverage / availability of routes, and operational hours. Other challenges and opportunities in Aberdeenshire are discussed in turn below and provide the context for the policies included in the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS).

8.2 Challenges

8.2.1 Geography

Aberdeenshire Council is the fourth largest by area in Scotland and covers 2,437 square miles or 6,313km². The area is predominantly rural with no major urban areas. The total population is 263,723 according to the 2022 Census, spread across the area, with only six towns having a population of 10,000 or more. This is an increase of 4.3% since the previous Census in 2011. The population is projected to increase by 1.7% to 268,490 by 2033 and then to decrease slightly to 267,796 by 2043. The biggest increase is expected in the population over the age of 60 which is projected to increase by 16% by 2033 and by 20% by 2043 which is higher than the national trend.

The 2022 population estimates show that Aberdeenshire's proportion of children under 15, at 17%, is slightly higher than the Scottish average. The Council's mainstream school rolls show a predicted decrease in primary pupils of 10.3% and an increase in secondary pupils of 4.4% between 2024 and 2028 which will impact on school transport requirements. After 2028 the number of secondary pupils is predicted to reduce significantly.



The geographic extent of the area, dispersed land use pattern and its ageing population all present key challenges for the passenger transport network. For example, an increasing proportion of the population may become more reliant on passenger transport to access healthcare, local services and facilities, and it will become increasingly important that these transport services are maintained and improved.

New residential and commercial developments in Aberdeenshire are often low density and these can be challenging to serve by bus, especially during the initial development phase when low demand means that service provision is unlikely to be financially viable for operators. In the longer term these developments can provide an opportunity to expand the passenger transport network and generate new patronage on services. Larger-scale developments may also be accompanied by developer contributions that could provide initial pump prime funding to support services.

8.2.2 Funding

Funding remains a key, if not foremost, challenge for delivering and supporting passenger transport in Aberdeenshire. Like all transport authorities across the UK, Aberdeenshire Council faces very significant financial pressures and recent revenue and capital budget reductions have coincided with significant increases in supply costs across the transport sector, presenting an ongoing challenge for the delivery of essential passenger transport services whilst achieving best value. As an example, the cost of providing school transport increased by 28% from £17,839,770 to £22,883,685 between financial years 2018-19 and 2023-24.

The Council therefore monitors spending carefully and ensures that when funding decisions are being made, that an objective and rigorous framework is used to determine its choices when supporting services. Nevertheless, the continued affordability of some passenger transport services is extremely challenging and the development of any new bus services or infrastructure will likely require external funding.

8.2.3 Car Ownership

Census data (2022) shows that Aberdeenshire has high levels of car access, with only 13.3% of households having no access to a car. This is reflected in the high percentage of people, 58.6%, travelling to work as either a car driver or car



passenger, compared to only 1.8% travelling by bus. The proportion of the population travelling to work by bus almost halved in ten years, down from 3.5% in the 2011 Census.

This high level of car ownership is challenging from both a public transport delivery perspective and in terms of climate change. In general people who have access to a car will use their car in preference to the bus unless there is a compelling reason not to do so such as availability and / or cost of parking.

Substantial numbers of Aberdeenshire's working residents commute outwith the Council area, primarily to Aberdeen, but also to other neighbouring authorities such as Angus and Moray. The relative ease of parking in Aberdeen does little to deter car use for travel into the city at present.

In some cases, particularly in rural areas, car ownership may be forced rather than a choice due to the lack of available public transport.

8.2.4 Change in Travel Behaviour

The COVID-19 pandemic has had what appears to be long-term impacts on travel behaviour, affecting commuting and business travel and to a lesser degree, shopping, leisure and other travel. Commuting activity has reduced with new working patterns. Many office-based workers now work from home for at least part of the week, taking advantage of digital technology to facilitate flexible working. Shopping for many goods is now increasingly conducted online with online sales in 2024 around 26% of retail sales, up from around 18% pre-pandemic, and a number of personal and health services are available digitally or by telephone, reducing the number of such personal trips that need to be made.¹³ Conversely, there is some evidence that leisure travel has increased post pandemic. Bus and train passenger numbers remained below pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

¹³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi>



8.2.5 Bus Service Delivery

Bus service delivery throughout the UK has been particularly affected by a shortage of qualified bus drivers in recent years. This has been caused by several factors including the COVID-19 pandemic causing some drivers from overseas to return home and others to re-evaluate their lifestyle choices and retire or pursue other careers. Better remunerated driving jobs in the HGV sector have also had an impact and the number of drivers reaching retirement age has not been matched by new recruits entering the industry. The situation was also exacerbated by delays post-lockdown in obtaining driving test appointments for new drivers from DVSA. Initiatives by bus operators, including improved pay rates and more flexible shift patterns, mean that the situation has been slowly recovering and there is only now a steady supply of drivers beginning to be hired and trained.

The operation of bus services has also been affected by the availability of vehicle parts, often imported or manufactured from imported raw materials, leading to buses being out of service for longer periods of time than would normally be anticipated, adversely affecting service reliability.

The community transport (CT) sector has difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers for reasons that include volunteers not returning post COVID-19, the current economic climate and HMRC tax implications affecting the level of reimbursement of volunteer car expenses. This means that in some cases volunteers or voluntary car schemes are not covering their motoring costs. The lack of availability of volunteer drivers makes it difficult to maintain services and acts as a constraint on growth of this sector.

8.3 Opportunities

8.3.1 Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has created new opportunities to improve bus services and these include:

- Bus Services Improvement Partnerships;
- Low Emission Zones;
- local bus service franchises;



- the ability of transport authorities to operate local bus services directly under a PSV Operator's Licence; and,
- workplace parking licensing schemes.

Each of these measures present their own opportunities and challenges. Due to the rural nature of Aberdeenshire, some measures may be more appropriate than others and some could be more relevant for travel into and within Aberdeen. The Council will monitor the scope for these to contribute to improving passenger transport services.

8.3.2 Bus Services Improvement Partnership

The Council, together with Aberdeen City Council and other partners in the North East of Scotland Bus Alliance, has agreed to pursue the option of using the powers in the Act to form a statutory Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Plan.

Bus Alliance members are developing a region-wide 'Plan' to enhance bus service quality standards across the North East of Scotland and gain access to new funding for investment in public transport projects and activities. The Plan is intended to bring benefits to existing and new bus passengers through enhanced quality and efficiency of bus services, support the efficient use of the road network, reduce the impact of traffic congestion, and assist in enhancing air quality. Further benefits in relation to economic development, equalities and climate change are also envisaged.

To achieve the objectives described above, the Bus Alliance partners have agreed a series of approaches that they wish to pursue, and these have informed the policy themes of this strategy. The envisaged service delivery interventions will be implemented under the overarching BSIP Plan. The BSIP is also intended to provide an opportunity to leverage in external funding.

8.4 Summary

The challenges and opportunities identified have informed the policies within the PTS, the themes of which are outlined in Chapter 11.



Given the funding challenges facing the Council, it is anticipated the delivery of many aspects of the PTS and comprehensive implementation of the proposed BSIP Plan with Bus Alliance partners will be dependent upon sourcing significant external funding streams.

The PTS policies are detailed in Chapter 11. It is anticipated that the PTS and its policies will cover the next 10 years from 2025. Any additional challenges and opportunities which may present themselves to the Council in the future may be difficult to forecast or predict. As such, it is good practice to explore and investigate the bus industry and the potential industry trends which may develop over the 10 years in which the PTS is in effect. The role of technology in the future of the bus industry is outlined in more detail in chapter 9.



9 Bus Industry Futures

9.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the anticipated technological advancements and operational shifts with the potential to shape the bus industry in Aberdeenshire over the lifetime of the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS), which is foreseen to be up to 2035. Understanding and anticipating these changes are important for the Council staying informed, prepared, and adaptable. The key opportunities identified are:

- Zero Emission Buses (ZEBs);
- Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT);
- Artificial Intelligence (AI); and,
- Mobility as a Service (MaaS) and Sharing Economy.

9.2 Zero Emission Buses

A combination of technological development, bus industry investment and Scottish Government financial support to operators, has seen significant progress in the replacement of diesel powered vehicles with zero emission buses across Scotland in recent years. The majority of these are battery electric powered but there has also been investment, most notably in the North East of Scotland, in hydrogen fuel cell powered buses.

These trends will continue, but there are two principal constraints to the full transition to zero emission in the Aberdeenshire bus fleet: these are the high cost, particularly of hydrogen buses and associated infrastructure; and limits to battery range which currently hampers the conversion of longer distance inter-urban services to zero emission. Cost considerations also make it less likely that zero emission vehicles will be used extensively on school transport services for the duration of this strategy.

The pace of technological development however gives encouragement to the view that affordable and effective solutions will be found to extend zero emission bus operation throughout Aberdeenshire. This may take the form of further improvements



in battery range that allow longer distance buses to complete a full day's operation without recharge, developments in opportunity charging where buses receive a fast top up from high power chargers while on-route, and reductions in the cost of hydrogen systems as the technology becomes more widely used. These developments mean that zero emission bus operation will become a realistic prospect for small operators as well as large, albeit this may require public sector funding, for example from the Scottish Government.

9.3 Digital Demand Responsive Transport

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a well-established concept in which flexible services provide shared transport to users who specify their desired origin and/or destination locations and preferred times of pick-up and drop-off. DRT can complement or replace fixed route bus services and improve mobility in low-density rural areas and at low-demand times of day. In Aberdeenshire, the Council supports one public DRT service branded as Central Buchan A2B dial-a-bus with users prebooking travel by email or phone via the Council's Travel Dispatch Centre.¹⁴

A drawback of the A2B model has been the lead time to schedule buses and drivers which means users need to make booking requests at least one hour before they intend to travel. Recent advances in vehicle scheduling software and electronic communications have led to the development of a more dynamic version of DRT known as Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) in which booking requests are most commonly made through a mobile phone app and booked passengers are updated about their bus in real time.

9.3.1 Ready2Go DDRT

The Council conducted a pilot DDRT project in the wider Inverurie area between 16 August 2021 and 1 April 2023. Known as Ready2Go Around Inverurie, the scheme replaced three fixed route supported bus services with a more extensive service in terms of operating hours and coverage, providing users with the opportunity to travel direct between different, mainly rural, locations. Surveys showed that most users reported satisfaction with the service, the service was successful in opening up new travel opportunities, and the pilot provided valuable insights for future DDRT schemes.

¹⁴ <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/public-transport/A2B-dial-a-bus/>



Key 'lessons learned' from the Ready2Go Around Inverurie pilot project were that:

- implementation timescales should be sufficient to establish objectives, gather baseline data and determine the procurement approach and specification for both the transport operation and back-office systems;
- there is a need to determine the operating model, for example zone-based versus semi-fixed route, service objectives, existing passenger demand, population density, anticipated level of new demand, and the number and location of potential destinations;
- when reviewing potential locations for DDRT consideration should be given to the prevailing supported and commercial bus services operating in the area, the local availability of transport operators, the desirable scale and nature (single or multi-zone) of the DDRT service and the resilience of the mobile phone network;
- DDRT schemes should include the option for passengers to book by telephone as well as an app to enable people from all age groups and socio-economic backgrounds to access the service;
- to appeal to the widest customer base, subject to the availability of budget, the DDRT service should have relatively long operating hours and little variation in service start and finish times across the week; and
- DDRT schemes need an extensive communication strategy to publicise the launch of a new service, explain how the service works and maintain ongoing promotional campaigns for the duration of the service, to provide existing and prospective users with the necessary knowledge, confidence and reassurance, whilst setting realistic user expectations.

The Ready2Go DDRT pilot project highlighted that DDRT can significantly improve access opportunities and can support several key national, regional and local objectives, including those set out in this strategy document. It should be recognised, however, that DDRT is not necessarily a low-cost option compared to fixed route bus services: driver costs are essentially the same unless taxis/PHVs are operated and while there may be some small fuel and maintenance savings from using smaller buses, there are also software support charges. The Council will monitor software developments that can give rise to higher vehicle utilisation and therefore reduce operational costs and consider suitable opportunities including funding streams to introduce new DDRT in the future.



9.4 Artificial Intelligence

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the bus industry has the potential to optimise routes, journey times, passenger satisfaction, safety, and traffic management. AI is already being integrated and used in the bus industry, for example in timetable scheduling, and as AI develops there will be more advanced applications to improve bus services. There is also significant investment and publicity around autonomous vehicles and the Automated Vehicles Act 2004 sets the statutory framework for autonomous driving on the UK's roads.

Public transport is a good area for early adoption of Automated Driving as autonomous buses and smaller shuttles can provide good feeder services to mobility hubs in certain environments and bus services using well delineated bus routes and bus lanes can provide a good environment for early adoption. Autonomous feeder shuttles, say within business parks, a town centre, or a housing development, can have the flexibility to provide a door-to-door service on demand, providing excellent accessibility for the mobility impaired, and in doing so delivering an inclusive service.

AI can play a crucial role in enhancing traffic management and reducing congestion for buses. AI can enhance bus network routing and scheduling by analysing extensive datasets related to conditions such as location, speed and demand. Leveraging data from GPS, sensors, and smartphones, AI enables real-time demand forecasting and continual adjustments for optimised bus services. In the case of higher frequency bus services, ongoing monitoring of vehicles can ensure smoother flow and minimises bus clustering, resulting in punctual and appropriately spaced bus arrivals.

AI-based systems can mitigate bus delays by dynamically re-routing vehicles away from congestion, accidents, or road closures. These AI-powered bus systems can seamlessly integrate with public intelligent transport systems, including traffic signal controls. By coordinating traffic lights and bus services, this AI-based traffic management approach can effectively reduce delays for buses and the broader transportation network. Such systems would be of most benefit for bus services operating into Aberdeen where greater traffic congestion is experienced.

9.5 Mobility as a Service and Sharing Economy

In the long term, personal mobility could be provided by the Mobility as a Service (MaaS) model where a variety of travel options may be offered such as bus season ticket, taxi, bike hire and car club. This concept could open up a new world of travel options for those who do not have access to a car or hold a driving licence. Trials are developing MaaS, where,



instead of owning a car, an individual can sign up to a monthly subscription service to provide them with all their travel needs. Users plan and pay for their journeys using an app, and the mobility service provider provides them with the most suitable transport for their travel needs, which can be public transport, cycle hire, a taxi or car hire. However, commercial business cases have not yet been fully demonstrated and widespread adoption, which would be likeliest initially in large urban areas, would seem to be beyond the timeframe for this strategy.

The wider sharing economy is leading to new private car hire platforms where individuals can rent out their own vehicle to local people for short periods of time. Whilst these services would be independent from the Council, it would be useful for the local authority to be aware of their existence. Such access to private cars locally will help reduce car ownership and, in turn, may reduce the overall number of car trips.

9.6 Summary

The potential of the technological developments described is to contribute towards the facilitation and delivery of an integrated, clean transport network, travelling autonomously, attending to transport needs through sophisticated communication and data processing: anyone can get anywhere in reasonable time and at reasonable cost.

The future of the bus industry has influenced the objectives of the PTS, and the outcomes which are expected to be achieved as a result of the PTS' policies. As the strategy will be in effect for 10 years the objectives should reflect Aberdeenshire's medium to long-term ambitions for the passenger transport network. Chapter 10 details the outcomes, objectives and policy themes of the PTS.



10 Outcomes, Objectives and Policy Themes

10.1 Introduction

Whilst recognising the challenges of sourcing adequate funding, the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) is intended to deliver aspirational Strategy Outcomes during its lifetime that reflect the key societal aims and priorities of the Council. The Strategy Outcomes relate to the achievement of high-level strategy objectives, translated into transport objectives.

The Council's ability to achieve the Strategy, and in turn the Transport Objectives, will depend upon the level of resources available over the lifetime of the strategy and the ability of the Council to control, and partners to commit to, key measures necessary for their delivery.

A series of policy themes will frame the Council's activities in meeting the transport objectives.

10.2 Strategy Outcomes

The Council's three Strategy Outcomes for the PTS are to:

1. improve life opportunities and the quality of life for residents of Aberdeenshire, through appropriate passenger transport provision, supporting resilient connected communities;
2. increase bus use by encouraging a shift in travel from car to passenger transport; and
3. reduce carbon emissions by reducing the number of total vehicle trips that are made year on year and by increasing the proportion of trips that are made using low and zero emission passenger transport vehicles.



10.3 Strategy Objectives

The four Strategy Objectives to deliver the Strategy Outcomes are to:

1. address the barriers which stop people travelling by bus, or prevent people from using the bus more often;
2. improve the quality of the bus-user experience;
3. decarbonise passenger transport; and,
4. deliver a financially sustainable network of passenger transport services.

10.4 Transport Objectives

The Transport Objectives that have been developed from the wider Strategy Objectives are to:

1. improve bus service reliability by reducing the number of bus journey cancellations affecting our communities;
2. make bus travel affordable to more people;
3. increase the number of Aberdeenshire residents who can access key service centres using public transport;
4. improve the punctuality of bus services;
5. widen the availability of public transport to more Aberdeenshire residents through timetabled or demand responsive services;
6. reduce bus journey times to key service centres;
7. reduce the frequency of changes to bus services;
8. reduce the proportion of diesel-powered buses operating in Aberdeenshire year-on-year;
9. deliver a reliable, effective and efficient client transport service; and,
10. attract investment to enhance transport connections between our towns and villages.

These Transport Objectives will be framed in measurable and time bound terms to ensure that they are SMART and the associated targets and timescales will be subject to regular review.



10.5 Policy Themes

The policies that the Council will pursue to achieve the Transport Objectives have been grouped into ten Policy Themes and these are:

1. Infrastructure
2. Vehicles
3. Service delivery and quality
 - 'Public' Transport Services
 - School Transport
 - Social Work Transport
4. Planning and delivery framework
 - Bus Services Improvement Partnership
 - Franchising
 - Council direct bus operation
5. Integration
6. Innovation
7. Engagement
8. Passenger affordability
9. Value for money
10. Monitoring

The relationship between Strategy Outcomes, Strategy Objectives, Transport Objectives and the identified Policy Themes is summarised in Figure 10-1.



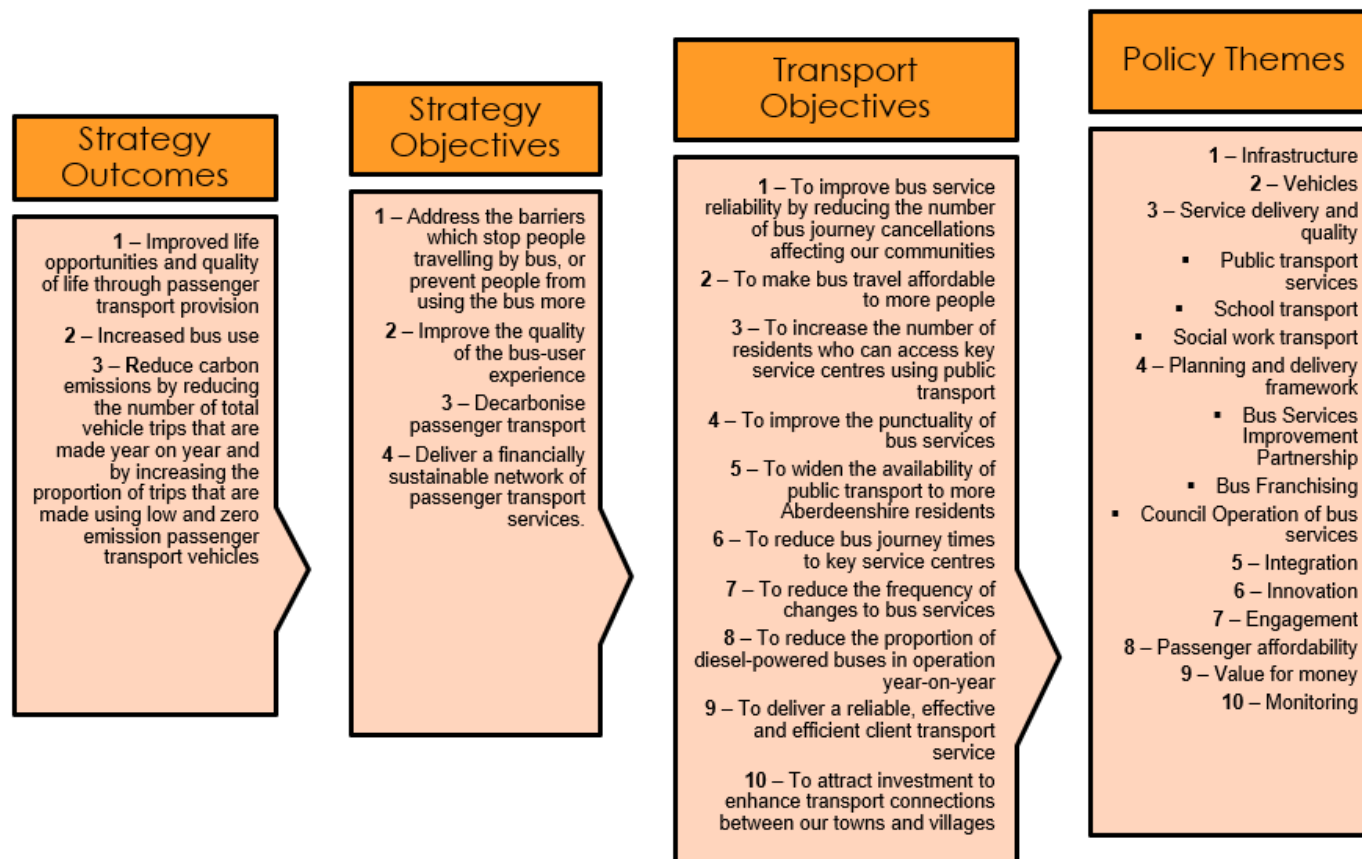


Figure 10-2 Strategy Outcomes, Objectives and Policy Themes



11 Passenger Transport Policies

This chapter identifies the passenger transport policies which will be in effect for 10 years to 2035. The policies serve as the guiding principles that shape the Council's approach to the provision of safe, efficient, and sustainable passenger transport services. Through these policies, the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) aims to develop a transport system that is responsive to the needs of users, adaptable to changes in demand and technology, and which contributes to the social, economic and environmental well-being of communities.

This chapter forms the Council's Passenger Transport Policy Statement outlining its general policies on public transport and other passenger transport services. The Strategy Outcomes will be monitored and individual policies may therefore be reviewed in light of changing circumstances during the course of the strategy.

It is recognised that adequate budget is required for the successful delivery of the strategy and therefore external funding will require to be sought to complement Council resources where appropriate.

11.1 Infrastructure

High quality supporting bus infrastructure is a key element in creating attractive public transport that people want to use, especially when compared with travel by car. It is important that the infrastructure utilised on the network in regard to bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, interchanges and mobility hubs are high quality and attractive, well maintained and accessible to the travelling public.

Service reliability and punctuality are key issues for the attractiveness of bus services therefore the provision of bus priority infrastructure to minimise the impact of general traffic congestion on bus passenger times and journey time reliability can be an essential component of a high-quality service.

The Council's policies regarding passenger transport infrastructure are as follows:



Policy 1.1: The Council will seek to secure the provision of high-quality passenger infrastructure and associated information for the convenience of existing passengers and in the interests of encouraging greater usage of public and other passenger transport services.

Policy 1.2: The Council will provide, maintain and clean bus stops and bus shelters to the highest standard possible within the resources at its disposal.

Policy 1.3: Passenger transport infrastructure provided by the Council will be designed to meet the accessibility needs of the travelling public, in compliance with disability-related legislation and relevant guidance.

Policy 1.4: The Council will maintain and, where appropriate, operate its bus stations and mobility hubs and will ensure that these facilities are available to all operators on an equitable basis.

Policy 1.5: The Council will seek the introduction of bus priority and other traffic management measures where deemed necessary to assist the reliability and punctuality of local bus services and/or improve journey times.

11.2 Vehicles

The quality of the bus fleet in Aberdeenshire has continued to improve in recent years with investment in new vehicles by operators, including the introduction of electric zero emission buses and coaches. The Council specifies vehicle standards for supported passenger transport services, and these are reviewed and updated periodically.

In relation to vehicles the Council's policies are:

Policy 2.1: The Council will specify appropriate vehicles on all contracted passenger transport services including minimum engine standards and encourage operators to deploy high quality, low emission vehicles.

Policy 2.2: The Council will encourage the long-term conversion by operators of the passenger transport fleet in Aberdeenshire to zero emission.



Policy 2.3: The Council will encourage operators to provide bike-carrying facilities on commercial local bus services and will specify bike racks on supported bus services where appropriate.

Policy 2.4: The Council will seek the operation on commercial bus services of accessible vehicles suitable for passengers with disabilities and specify such vehicles on supported bus services.

11.3 Service Delivery and Quality

11.3.1 'Public' Transport Services

It is recognised that some parts of Aberdeenshire are better connected by public transport to key service centres than others, where transport poverty may occur, and that there are a range of factors associated with bus services which deter people from using the bus more or using the bus at all.

The public survey undertaken as part of the PTS development cited the cost of travel as the most common major reason that bus users do not make use of the bus more often, followed by service frequency and reliability. For non-bus users, frequency, reliability and the level of service cancellations were the top three major reasons given for not using the bus. The timing of the last bus home was also a notable barrier to greater bus use.

Reliability and punctuality are, to some extent, within the control of bus operators and addressing these issues may not always have a substantial revenue cost, for example, if no additional buses need to be deployed. However, increasing service frequencies and/or operating later buses does have a continuing cost and the extent to which these can be addressed will crucially depend on the level of funding available and how effectively this funding can be employed. This is set against a context where the total actual expenditure on supporting 'public' transport services in Aberdeenshire reduced by 16% between 2017-2018 and 2023-24 and therefore external funding will need to be sought to complement Council investment.

In some circumstances demand responsive transport (DRT) may be more appropriate than timetabled fixed route services. DRT services may be registered as open to the public like conventional bus services or can be provided under a Section 19 Permit to restricted groups, for example, older/disabled people or residents of an area that does not have an alternative bus service.



The Council's policies on 'public' transport services are as follows:

Policy 3.1: The Council will seek to secure the provision of passenger transport services to meet local travel needs which are not otherwise met by commercial operators and in doing so address gaps in connectivity, subject to available vehicle resources, the financial resources at its disposal and value for money.

Policy 3.2: The Council will encourage and assist the development of community-based passenger transport services and, subject to the financial resources at its disposal, provide funding for community transport organisations through the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative or similar funding mechanisms.

Policy 3.3: The Council will, at its discretion, make available its 'in-house' passenger transport vehicles on a hire basis to community bodies.

Policy 3.4: The Council will support the vision of the Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) scheme and the delivery of its benefits.

Policy 3.5: The Council will, where appropriate, secure the provision of demand responsive transport (DRT) services to cater for travel needs, supported by a travel dispatch centre for booking and scheduling.

Policy 3.6: The Council will support the development and implementation of a joint Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) with Aberdeen City Council to improve the operational performance of bus services and deliver a high-quality network of bus services across the North East of Scotland.

Policy 3.7: The Council will work with relevant partners to implement the actions set out in the Council's Bus Information Strategy and ensure that the expected standards for bus information are adhered to by those responsible.

Policy 3.8: The Council will work in partnership with operators and neighbouring authorities to provide real time passenger information on all fixed route local bus services across Aberdeenshire.

Policy 3.9: The Council will work with operators and other partners to deliver marketing and other publicity initiatives that enhance the image of, and promote the availability of, public transport to encourage patronage growth.



Policy 3.10: The Council will work with relevant partners and agencies to provide services and facilities with which people feel comfortable and safe, assisting where appropriate the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), the Scottish Police Service and the Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area.

11.3.2 School Transport

Section 42 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, (the 1980 Act) regarding pupil attendance sets out the maximum distances pupils can be expected to walk to school. Section 51 of the 1980 Act requires education authorities to make such provision for school transport as they consider necessary, or to pay all or part of reasonable travelling expenses incurred. The combined duties of Sections 42 and 51 require education authorities to provide home-to-school transport, whenever it would be unreasonable, dangerous, or (in some cases) impossible, for a child to walk to school.

Section 51 (2) of the 1980 Act places a duty on the Council to make available any vacant seats on school transport services to those not entitled to free home-to-school transport. In Aberdeenshire, this is known as privilege school transport and is only provided where no additional service delivery costs are incurred. The Council will not provide home-to-school transport services solely for non-entitled pupils, irrespective of whether they attend 'in-zone' or 'out-of-zone' schools.

The Council places a high priority on school transport safety. In terms of walking to school or the pick-up/drop-off (PUDO) point of the school transport service, it is assumed that any child will be accompanied by a responsible adult. In instances where a fare-paying passenger transport service is available it is considered that there is a safe alternative to walking and therefore free transport will not be provided. Where the walk route is deemed unsafe for an 'in-zone' pupil and there is no safe alternative to walking free school transport is provided.

The Council will provide free home-to-school transport in accordance with the policies listed below:

Policy 3.11: The Council will provide free home-to-school transport to primary pupils who live more than two miles from and attend their zoned school.

Policy 3.12: The Council will provide free home-to-school transport to secondary pupils who live more than three miles from and attend their zoned school.



Policy 3.13: The Council will, where practicable, not expect primary or secondary pupils attending mainstream schools to have to travel one way for more than 45 or 60 minutes respectively on a school transport service, unless secondary pupils are provided with connecting transport in which case the maximum journey time shall be 75 minutes.

Policy 3.14: The Council will provide, where practicable, free home-to-school transport to pupils with additional support needs provided this has been authorised by the appropriate Head of Service based on objective assessment criteria.

Policy 3.15: Seat belts will be provided on all Council 'in-house' operated and 'contracted-in' school transport services, including any such services registered to operate as a Local Bus service, and no pupil will be expected to stand on any of these services.

Policy 3.16: The Council will provide home-to-school transport on safety grounds to pupils attending their zoned school, where the walk route is deemed unsafe for a child accompanied by a responsible adult and there is no safe alternative to walking such as public transport.

Policy 3.17: The Council will make available seats on school transport services on a privilege basis, to those pupils who are not eligible for free or safety home-to-school transport, where there is spare seating capacity on the vehicle and there is no additional cost to the Council.

11.3.3 Social Work Transport

Users of the Children's Service who have been placed in accommodation may be provided with transport under certain circumstances, either to school or on rare occasions to other locations. The relevant policy is:

Policy 3.18: The Council will provide appropriate transport for users of Children's Services at the discretion of Children's Services Social Work and Education, where a comprehensive needs assessment has identified the need for assistance with transport.



11.4 Planning and Delivery Framework

In addition to duties and powers under the Transport Act 1985 and the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has granted new discretionary powers to local transport authorities (LTAs) regarding the planning and operation of local bus services.

11.4.1 Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP)

A BSIP is designed to be a collaborative partnership with local bus operators that consists of a 'Plan' that defines objectives for the quality and effectiveness of local bus services and specifies 'Schemes' to meet those objectives. BSIP Schemes must consist of infrastructure 'Facilities' provided by the LTA (or LTAs in the case of a BSIP Plan constituted with a neighbouring authority) or other 'Measures' (such as the development of funding bids) designed to make substantive improvements to bus services. In return, participating bus operators must adhere to agreed 'Route and Operational Standards' that may relate to service frequency, vehicle quality (e.g. vehicle emission standards), maximum fares, ticketing and information.

Such partnership working may assist in leveraging in external funding for bus network enhancements, for example for infrastructure improvements, and should generate 'match-in-kind' funding from bus operator partners.

Acknowledging the potential benefits of such a joint working arrangement, the North East of Scotland Bus Alliance, of which the Council is an active participant, is seeking to move from its current voluntary governance structure to operate onto a statutory BSIP basis. The Council's policy on this matter is as follows:

Policy 4.1: The Council will endeavour to make and implement a Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Plan jointly with Aberdeen City Council to increase the modal share of bus, improve the operational performance of buses, improve perceptions of the quality of bus travel, reduce bus emissions per passenger journey and improve access to public transport for all, across the north-east of Scotland.

11.4.2 Bus Franchising



Under the current deregulated market commercial bus operators determine the services and timetables they wish to operate and the fares they charge and they bear the revenue risks associated with their operation. In doing so, essentially a bus operator only requires to 'register' its intention to operate a local bus service with the Traffic Commissioner. The LTA then identifies gaps in the commercial market where it wishes to procure additional bus services or journeys that it will support. In contrast, creation of a Bus Franchising framework for all, or part, of an LTA's area using the new discretionary powers allows an authority, or authorities acting jointly, to take full control over all bus services (commercial and supported) within the area of the framework and to determine the routes and timetables, the quality of service and fares charged.

Under this system, following a competitive tendering process, the authority or authorities award a bus company exclusive rights to operate the service(s) specified under the franchise, for a set period of time.

Promotion of a bus franchise creates an opportunity to align the specification of the services more closely to Council policies and priorities, but any aspirations for the introduction of improved services would depend on the availability of funding. The creation of any franchising framework would raise significant financial and other risks and is likely to incur significant set-up and ongoing costs for the Council which would require external funding.

The Aberdeenshire bus network is closely integrated with services to and from Aberdeen, so any effective franchise would probably need to cover both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council areas.

The Council's policy on this matter is as follows:

Policy 4.2: The Council will determine the potential risks and benefits of implementing a franchising framework, should local circumstances arise that merit such action.

11.4.3 Council Operation of Bus Services

Currently the Council operates a fleet of passenger transport vehicles under Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 which allows organisations such as the Council to run transport services for hire or reward without the need for a PSV Operator's Licence, provided the services are not carried out with a view to profit. The Council also has the long-established ability to apply for a Section 22 Community Bus Permit to operate 'registered' local bus services, under which 'bodies concerned for social and welfare needs ... may operate vehicles without a view to profit and use those vehicles to provide a community bus



service'. It can also use its school minibuses to operate 'registered' services under Section 46(1) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has removed the legislative restriction on Aberdeenshire Council holding a PSV Operator's Licence and the authority now has the power to operate local bus services in this way; provided it is satisfied that this will contribute to the implementation of its relevant general policies. A PSV Operator's Licence gives an LTA much more flexibility to provide local bus services by removing the requirement that all road passenger transport activities are 'exclusively non-commercial'. Such direct bus operation can be conducted 'in-house' or through an arm's length external organisation (ALEO).

Advantages to an LTA of holding a PSV Operator's Licence include increased accountability; the ability to avoid market instability or address market failure; and a means to prioritise passengers' needs over profit through reinvesting for improvements. Where commercial operators fail to provide a socially necessary service, Council run bus services could appropriately fill this gap rather than by inviting operators to tender for a contract(s). Similarly, where the market fails to produce sufficient value for money bids this could also warrant the direct Council operation of bus services.

There may also be potential benefits of running bus services through an arm's length bus company. The distinct separation between the company and the authority could increase the chances of commercial sustainability and reduce the likelihood of perceived unfair advantage over commercial operators. The ALEO option also allows the LTA to continue operating some services such as dial-a-bus with a Section 19 Permit, which is less administratively onerous and allows service changes to be introduced more quickly, or under a Section 22 Community Bus Permit, neither of which are allowed if the Council obtains a PSV Operator's Licence.

It is acknowledged that direct bus operation would give greater control over service delivery and may offer the potential to moderate tender prices to some extent. However, a Council bus operation would be subject to the same market pressures as existing operators, including staff recruitment and cost inflation and would take on these business risks currently borne by the private sector. Depending on the scale of operation, setting up and running a new company could require substantial implementation and running costs for procurement of staff, buses, depot, workshop equipment and supporting systems as well as significant officer time and resources. Failure to maintain vehicles and operate services in a professional manner would affect the Council's reputation and, unless operating under an ALEO, could have a detrimental effect on the Council's HGV Operator's Licence.



Any direct operation of a local bus service would be subject to potential competition from private sector bus operators who could choose, for example, to operate competing bus services and/or tender for any bus franchise.

The Council's policy on this matter is as follows:

Policy 4.3: The Council will operate PSVs under Permit legislation and continue to monitor the potential financial and other benefits of operating bus services under a PSV Operator's licence with a view to doing so if supported by a robust business case and the availability of necessary capital and revenue funding.

11.5 Integration

Passenger transport integration refers to the co-ordination between individual bus services and between different modes to create seamless travel opportunities, minimising the impact of interchange and providing clear information on when, where and how services may be used. Key elements of integration are timetabling, ticketing and information.

Timetable integration includes appropriately timed passenger transport connections to mainline bus corridors and rail services and can be supported by dedicated 'on-street' interchange facilities, purpose-built mobility hubs, Park and Ride facilities and other infrastructure.

The GrassHOPPER multi-operator bus pass was launched in 2014, offering day and weekly tickets designed to make bus travel in the North East of Scotland more convenient, as customers do not need to purchase separate tickets when using different operators for one journey. The UK-wide PlusBus and Railbus schemes and the Council's Aberdeenshire Connect initiative also offer some through ticketing opportunities.

The Council's Bus Information Strategy sets relevant standards and outlines the means and objectives by which comprehensive and meaningful information about the bus network in Aberdeenshire will be delivered, including information about routes and timetables.

The Council's policies in relation to integration are:



Policy 5.1: The Council will work with partners to achieve closer integration of passenger transport services and active travel opportunities.

Policy 5.2: The Council will seek to achieve, wherever practicable, convenient timetable connections between passenger transport services including with rail services.

Policy 5.3: The Council will provide and support measures to allow ease of interchange with and between passenger transport services, including the provision and maintenance of appropriate passenger infrastructure and information, within the resources at its disposal.

Policy 5.4: The Council will seek funding to develop Park and Ride facilities and mobility hubs on mainline public transport corridors, to provide dedicated interchange opportunities with walking, wheeling, cycling, private transport and fixed bus route or demand responsive transport (DRT) services.

Policy 5.5: The Council will work in partnership with operators to provide multi-operator ticketing arrangements and will consider the introduction of a statutory multi-operator ticketing scheme or schemes if appropriate.

Policy 5.6: The Council will ensure that passenger transport issues are addressed within the Statutory Local Development Plan framework and associated procedures related to transport assessment and developer contributions.

11.6 Innovation

Technological advancement and operational shifts have contributed to the shape and look of the Aberdeenshire passenger transport network with recent innovations including the introduction of zero emission buses and trialling of Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT). These and future opportunities have the potential to contribute towards the delivery of an integrated, clean transport network over the lifetime of this strategy. Such innovations may also have a role to play in reducing the cost of service delivery.

The Council's policies regarding innovation are:



Policy 6.1: The Council will work in partnership with operators, Transport Scotland, and other authorities to explore the opportunities of new and emerging e-ticketing technologies.

Policy 6.2: The Council will seek to maximise the benefits of new technology and means of communication to display and disseminate passenger information.

Policy 6.3: The Council will apply the lessons learned from the Ready2Go Around Inverurie pilot project, monitor digital demand responsive transport (DDRT) supply side innovations and where appropriate, secure the provision of DDRT services.

Policy 6.4: The Council will seek external funding to implement pilot projects to test the applicability and benefits of innovative passenger transport technologies.

11.7 Engagement

The importance of engaging with Aberdeenshire residents and other stakeholders in helping to shape the delivery of an optimal passenger transport service for Aberdeenshire is recognised, particularly in the context of directing scarce resources and the prioritisation of any new investment. The importance of feeding back relevant outcomes is also acknowledged as a key element of the engagement process.

Transport will feature in community engagement when developing Place Plans in line with the Council's Place Strategy and Place Policy. The place and wellbeing outcomes developed for Scotland under the 'Movement' theme recognise public transport as being key, with the goal being that everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate, and safe public transport service.

The Council will collaborate with partners and communities to attract investment to enhance travel opportunities and transport connections between towns and villages.

The Aberdeenshire Bus Forum is the Council's main source for disseminating information to bus users and the wider community and for discussions to be held about passenger transport services. Forum meetings, which are open to the public, are hosted by the Council with Council officers and bus operator(s) taking a lead. They are attended by bus users,



community council representatives, members of other community or special interest groups and Aberdeenshire councillors. There has been a move towards online / hybrid meetings to attract new participants from a range of backgrounds, to reduce travel to help meet climate change targets and to support the Council's digital strategy.

The Council's communication with bus users has focussed on the use of email mailing lists but further development of the Forum could include the addition of newsletters and social media posts in-between meetings to provide updates on bus service and related matters.

In addition, the Council welcomes feedback from customers and stakeholders on school transport.

The following are the Council's policies on engagement:

Policy 7.1: The Council will inform and consult with members of the public and the wider community about local bus matters through bespoke surveys and regular Bus Forum meetings.

Policy 7.2: Feedback on travel needs will be sought through the Community Planning Process and during the development of the Council's Place Plans for local areas.

Policy 7.3: The Council will undertake periodic demand responsive transport and school transport customer satisfaction surveys.

Policy 7.4: The Council will consult with local bus operators on passenger transport-related matters including through its participation in the North East of Scotland Bus Alliance.

Policy 7.5: To assist the community and voluntary sector, the Council will continue to administer the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Forum to seek the views of the sector and as a mechanism for sharing best practice.

11.8 Passenger Affordability

The commercial local bus market provides a range of discounted tickets for frequent or regular users and similar tickets are specified on Council supported services. There is however currently no routine capping of daily / weekly fares such as exists



in other parts of the country and which can help address affordability for those who have difficulty in buying high value discounted period tickets in advance.

The public survey undertaken in developing the Strategy highlighted the cost of travel as the most frequently cited major reason amongst bus users for not using buses more often, therefore reducing this cost-barrier would improve peoples' life opportunities across Aberdeenshire. It is recognised, by Public Health Scotland and more widely, that the impacts of transport poverty are worse for poorer people in rural areas.

Residents who are aged under 22 or over 60 or are disabled are entitled to free travel on bus services throughout Scotland with a National Entitlement Card (NEC) or Young Scot NEC. For other users, fares are set by bus operators for commercial services and by the Council for services that it supports. In the latter case, Council policy will align fares with the commercial market given that many service routes overlap.

On passenger affordability the Council policies are as follows:

Policy 8.1: The Council will work in partnership with operators to seek provision of fare values and ticket ranges which are affordable and encourage usage of public transport services, but without undermining the financial sustainability of bus services.

Policy 8.2: Adult and child single fares on Council supported passenger transport will normally be set to accord with, and will be no higher than, commercial pricing in the area.

Policy 8.3: The Council will encourage, and assist where appropriate, local bus operators to offer fare capping (where the maximum amount a passenger pays over a given period is capped), on an individual operator and multi-operator basis.

Policy 8.4: The Council will support the Scottish Blind Persons Travel Scheme.



11.9 Value for Money

The Council has a duty to ensure that all funds are spent in the most appropriate manner and that best value is achieved. Audit Scotland describes Best Value as 'ensuring that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public'.

The following policies are intended to assist in achieving value for money:

Policy 9.1: When procuring passenger transport services the Council shall seek to achieve best value for money within the resources at its disposal and will consider all available service delivery options including 'in-house' operation.

Policy 9.2: The Council will use a performance management model for ranking the relative effectiveness of supported passenger transport services, to assist in determining best value and ensure that investment of public money is made in the most cost-effective manner.

Policy 9.3: To encourage competition for bus service contracts and reduce tender prices, the Council will, within the resources and powers at its disposal, undertake measures to support operators who wish to enter or remain in the local bus service market, including through the provision of an electronic ticket machine (ETM) back office.

Policy 9.4: The Council will endeavour to work in partnership with operators, local communities, Nestrans, neighbouring authorities and other Community Planning partners, taking a place-based approach and aiming to attract investment in passenger transport.

11.10 Monitoring

It is important to monitor the range of services provided in terms of how these are performing, to assess whether best value is being achieved and establish how well the needs of service users and different communities are being met. Monitoring is also critical to determine whether the desired Strategy Outcomes are being achieved.



The Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area has regulatory responsibility for many aspects of passenger transport service quality. Where practicable and appropriate the Council will assist the Traffic Commissioner in monitoring bus service reliability, punctuality and other standards of service so they can take appropriate enforcement action.

The Council's policies in relation to this activity are listed below:

Policy 10.1: The Council will monitor passenger transport service delivery performance using appropriate performance indicators, which shall be reported and published on a regular basis, and will benchmark performance against comparable rural transport authorities.

Policy 10.2: The Council will, within the resources at its disposal, monitor the day-to-day operational performance of the Council funded passenger transport network, and in the case of 'contracted-in' services, apply a liquidated and ascertained damages system for incidences of non-compliance.



12 Delivery Framework

12.1 Introduction

This final chapter sets out the overall strategic framework through which the Council will influence and deliver passenger transport services to/from and within Aberdeenshire over the ten-year period, commencing 2025. Chapter 12, section 12.2, and the 'public' transport policies in chapter 11 form the Council's Passenger Transport Policy Statement. The strategic framework includes a combination of approaches, reflecting the deregulated market for local bus services and desire by the Council to maintain effective partnership working with private transport operators and others, in all aspects of passenger transport service delivery, whilst also recognising the Council's role as a procurement agency. The approaches are not intended to be prescriptive, with the Council adopting an open approach to service provision through competitive tendering and/or direct operation to achieve best value and recognising that the most appropriate solution will require to account for local needs and circumstances and will depend upon the availability of internal and/or external funding.

Passenger and community engagement will continue to guide passenger transport service delivery within Aberdeenshire and the development of the Council's Place Plans may impact how transport delivery is shaped.

12.2 Process for Supporting Bus Services

In this chapter the terminology 'bus services' refers to timetabled or demand responsive local bus services, registered with the Traffic Commissioner as open to members of the public, as well as timetabled or demand responsive services operated by the Council under a Section 19 Permit which restricts carriage to defined classes of person.

The policies regarding public transport service delivery and planning that are set out in Chapter 11 are reflected in the Council's processes and procedures for prioritising bus service support.

At a high level, the intention is to pursue a Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) with Aberdeen City Council, under the auspices of the North East of Scotland Bus Alliance and in association with bus operators, to attract additional funding, accelerate decarbonisation of the vehicles deployed and deliver overall quality improvements across all aspects of bus service provision for the benefit of passengers.



Under the BSIP the Council along with operators of commercial bus services will jointly review the regional bus network on an area-by-area basis, with all parties committed to delivering agreed outcomes, recognising that different places in Aberdeenshire have varying needs and requirements. These area-based appraisal exercises will consider the relative merits of scheduled fixed route bus services, (digital) demand responsive transport services and, where considered appropriate, the role of the community transport sector, along with potential integration of school and other public sector passenger transport services. The resulting network of bus services, catering for strategic and local travel needs, may be delivered by a variety of different means and by different types of operators; and will be integrated wherever possible with other passenger transport services to achieve efficient use of vehicle and driver resources and deliver greater passenger and community benefits.

An alternative way of supporting bus services is through Bus Franchising. Guidance will be examined and the experience elsewhere of implementing Bus Franchising will be carefully monitored to assess the potential of this option. Development of a Business Case to determine the viability of Bus Franchising will only be pursued should partnership working under the Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Plan prove unsuccessful in adequately delivering the stated strategy objectives or in the event of significant failure of the local deregulated bus market.

One intention of making a BSIP is to enhance the extent/scale of the bus network delivered on a commercial basis by bus operators, however it is recognised that there will be a continuing need for the Council to support individual bus services, be that through competitive tendering or direct operation.

The anticipated method of service delivery is set out in the network typology below in Table 12-1 but is not intended to be prescriptive, as the most appropriate method in each instance will be determined by local circumstances such as operational constraints, market conditions and local travel needs.



| Category of Bus Service | Description | Likely Method of Service Delivery |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Mainline Radial | Inter-urban services on principal corridors linking Aberdeenshire service centres to Aberdeen. | Commercial services, with service standards agreed under BSIP Scheme(s). |
| Rural Feeder | Rural services with dual role: providing interchange opportunities with mainline radial services; and providing access to a local service centre. | Wholly supported by Council, with service standards specified by the Council. |
| Cross-Country Connecting | Catering for circumferential travel demands between key service centres, precluding the need for travel into and out of Aberdeen City. Cross-country connecting services can also act as rural feeder services into mainline routes. | Wholly or partly supported by Council, with service standards specified by the Council and/or agreed under BSIP Scheme(s). |
| Rural Standalone | Providing local access where specific travel needs have been identified, for example combined local bus/school transport services or A2B dial-a-bus shopper services. | Wholly supported by Council, with service standards specified by the Council. |
| Town | Town services providing interchange opportunities with mainline radial services, and also local access to the town centre and peripheral employment or retail locations. | Commercial services with service standards agreed under BSIP Scheme(s) or Supported by the Council, as appropriate. |

Table 12-1 Network Typology

In supporting bus services, the Council will adopt the following way of working:

12.2.1 Network Connectivity

When considering the supported bus network in its entirety the Council will initially consider the level of connectivity afforded between settlements, based on Table 5-1 included in Chapter 5; prioritising the provision of connectivity or access opportunities where these are lacking rather than, in the first instance, enhancing available public transport connections. The



approach taken to determine which improvements to connectivity should be prioritised, and how bus services should change, may be influenced by the outcome of the Council's Place Plans.

12.2.2 Individual Supported Services or Journeys

The Council will exercise its powers under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 to secure the provision of passenger transport services to meet travel needs which would otherwise not be met. This will ordinarily be through competitive tender unless direct operation by the Council proves better value.

The Council will continuously monitor the evolving commercial bus network provision and the performance of supported services.

When considering whether to support individual bus services or part-services, the Council will use a performance management framework (PMF) model as a tool to allow comparison of the relative performance of such services/journeys. This will assist in decision-making when considering whether to provide financial support for a new service or whether to maintain an existing service. It will not be used in a prescriptive manner but rather will be used alongside other factors, such as the outcome of Council Place Plans and consideration of local circumstances, to address identified connectivity issues.

The PMF model will allocate a performance score to each supported service or part-service based on various criteria which may be amended during the lifetime of the strategy in response to the outcomes of ongoing community engagement and the evolving local bus market. Examples of the criteria currently used include Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation scores; household car ownership levels; availability of alternative bus services; and the average cost per passenger journey incurred by the Council.

12.3 Process for Delivering Other Passenger Transport Services

This chapter covers those passenger transport services supported by the Council that are not included above.



12.3.1 School Transport

Home-to-school transport will generally be provided by procuring dedicated coach, bus, minibus or 'taxi' services from transport operators, but in some circumstances, transport may be directly operated by the Council, for example when this offers better value to the Council, or no transport operator expresses an interest in providing the service.

Where appropriate, mainstream school transport routes will be made open to members of the public and incorporated into a local bus service timetable, for example where demand has been identified or to provide a safe travel option for pupils. The Council will be open to entering into a financial arrangement with parents or carers to transport their child(ren) to school through agreement of a Parental Travel Budget (PTB), in instances where the child is entitled to free home-to-school transport and such an arrangement is in the interest of both the Council and parent/carer.

Council passenger transport vehicles primarily used for peak-hour home-to-school transport may also be allocated to operate dial-a-bus or timetabled bus services on Mondays to Fridays during the inter-peak period where such means of service delivery is considered best value.

12.3.2 Social Work Transport

Social work transport will be provided by procuring taxi transport by calling off a Framework or through competitive tender.

12.3.3 Community Transport

The Council appreciates the contribution the community transport or voluntary sector can make to the provision of passenger transport services and will encourage the continuation and development of such activity by: providing where possible advice to individuals and groups; administering the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Forum to enable the sharing of best practice; and allocating Grant Funding under the Aberdeenshire Community Transport Initiative (ACTI) through a formal application process. The Council will continue to work with community transport organisations through THInC (Transport to Health and Social Care Information Centre), HTAP (Health and Transport Action Plan), community planning and place planning.



12.4 Next Steps

12.4.1 Action Plan

An action plan setting out the key 'project' tasks to be delivered during the lifetime of the strategy is included as an appendix and sets out initial high-level strategic tasks, which are additional to the usual day-to-day work activities undertaken by the Council in the delivery of passenger transport.

The initially identified tasks are to: (1) agree SMART Transport Objectives for the Passenger Transport Strategy, (2) enter into a Bus Services Improvement Partnership under the auspices of the North-East of Scotland Bus Alliance, (3) review the public transport network in a phased manner with commercial bus operators in conjunction with implementation of a North-East of Scotland Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan taking a place-based approach, (4) work with North-East of Scotland Bus Alliance partners to progress the vision of Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) and inform the development of a business case, (5) explore opportunities for developing digital demand responsive transport services, (6) review the potential for, and risks of, expanding the Council's direct operation of school transport and/or bus services, (7) review Aberdeenshire Council's Bus Information Strategy, (8) review the methodology applied, using a PMF model, for assessing the performance of Council supported bus services or journeys, and (9) seek opportunities for external investment in the public transport network.

The action plan will be reviewed annually and as matters are progressed additional tasks will be identified if appropriate. The timescales are indicative and in some cases are affected by the timescales of partners and/or dependent upon funding availability.

12.4.2 Monitoring SMART Transport Objectives

As referred to in Chapter 10, and in the Action Plan in Appendix 2, the high-level strategy objectives will be translated into SMART transport objectives, i.e. goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound. which will form the basis for monitoring the success or otherwise of delivering the desired Strategy Outcomes. These will be monitored and reported annually and used to help evaluate the success of the PTS.





A.1 Appendix 1: Glossary

In this document the following terms are defined as:

Active travel - journeys made by modes of transport that are fully or partially people-powered, like walking or cycling.

Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) – a collaborative partnership between local transport authorities and bus operators constituted under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 (as amended by Section 35 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019) that consists of a ‘Plan’ that defines objectives for the quality and effectiveness of Local Bus services within a defined geographic area and ‘Schemes’ designed to meet these objectives.

Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan – a partnership plan promoted under Section 3A of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 covering all or part of a Local Transport Authority’s area and consisting of: an analysis of the Local Bus market; policies relating to Local Bus services; and objectives to be met with regard to the quality and effectiveness of the Local Bus services provided.

Bus Services Improvement Partnership Scheme – a partnership scheme promoted under Section 3B of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 that consists of Facilities and/or other Measures provided by the Local Transport Authority (or LTAs in the case of joint BSIPs promoted with neighbouring authorities) intended to make substantive improvements to bus services, and service Standards placed upon Bus Operators that they are committed to adhere to, and which may relate to frequency, vehicle quality, maximum fares, ticketing and information.

Client transport services – Council funded transport for pupils travelling to school or social work transport services, which may be contracted in or operated by the Council.

Community transport – transport operated by not-for-profit organisations or social enterprises. Services may be operated under a Section 19 or Section 22 Permit (see below for definitions) or under car-sharing legislation.

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) – flexible passenger transport services that provide shared transport to users who specify their desired location and time of pick-up and drop-off. Such services do not operate on a fixed route. Types of DRT include semi-flexible, one to many, many to one, and fully flexible area-based services.



Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) – a term for DRT services managed through a digital platform - typically involving a user app, a driver app and a real-time route optimisation system.

In-zone pupils – school pupils who reside within the catchment area of the school they attend.

Local Bus Service - a service by road for the carriage of passengers at separate fares, as defined under Section 2 of the Transport Act 1985.

Locality – a settlement with a population of at least 500.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS) – a type of service that enables users to plan, book, and pay for multiple types of mobility services through a combined platform.

Out-of-zone pupils – school pupils who attend school based on a placing request and who do not reside within the catchment area of the school they attend.

Private Hire Car (PHC) – a vehicle licensed in Scotland as a private hire car (known as a private hire vehicle elsewhere in the UK).

Passenger Transport Policy Statement (PTPS) – a statement of policies related to public passenger transport services published by a transport authority, as required by section 64 of the 1985 Transport Act.

Passenger transport services – all road-based passenger transport services including commercial and supported local bus services (fixed route and demand responsive), section 19, 22 and 46 services, formal volunteer car schemes, dedicated or closed school transport services, and any social work transport services.

Performance Management Framework (PMF) Model – a method of ranking the relative performance of supported bus services or bus journeys based on various factors, with a view to measuring which services provide best value.

Place Plans – community-led local place plans introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 setting out proposals for the development or use of land.



Public transport services – registered Local Bus services open to the public, rail services and express coach services.

‘Public’ transport services – for the purposes of this document - bus services that are open to the public, Council operated dial-a-bus or timetabled services available to some classes of people (e.g. older and disabled residents) and community transport.

Sharing economy – an economic model in which goods and resources are shared by individuals and groups in a collaborative way.

Section 19 – a permit issued under the Transport Act 1985 that allows not-for-profit organisations, such as local authorities and community transport operators, to charge for carrying passengers on minibuses, cars, or, MPVs. Only passengers of certain classes may be carried including: members of the organisation; disabled persons; pupils; and persons living within a geographically defined local community whose public transport needs are not otherwise met.

Section 22 – a permit issued under the Transport Act 1985 used by organisations that wish to run a Local Bus service carrying the public on a not-for-profit basis. Bus services must be registered with the Traffic Commissioner.

Service Centre – an urban area of more than 10,000 people which provides people with their day-to-day needs.

Supported passenger transport services – passenger transport services that are supported financially by the Council excluding dedicated or closed school transport or social work transport services.



A.2 Appendix 2: Action Plan (v1)

This action plan will be reviewed annually and as matters are progressed additional tasks will be identified if appropriate. The timescales are indicative and in some cases are affected by the timescales of partners and/or dependent upon funding availability.

| No. | Theme | Description | Indicative Target Timescale |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 1 | Strategy Delivery | Agree SMART Transport Objectives for the Passenger Transport Strategy, | Short-term: by October 2025 |
| 2 | Partnership | Enter into a Bus Services Improvement Partnership under the auspices of the North-East of Scotland Bus Alliance. | Short-term: by October 2025 |
| 3 | Bus Services Network | Review the public transport network in a phased manner with bus operators, in conjunction with implementation of a North-East of Scotland Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan, taking a place-based approach. | Medium-term: by April 2027. |
| 4 | Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) | Work with North-East of Scotland Bus Alliance partners to progress the vision of Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) and inform the development of a business case. | Short to medium-term: by December 2027 |
| 5 | Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) | Explore opportunities for developing digital demand responsive transport services. | Ongoing |
| 6 | Council Bus Operations | Review the potential for, and risks of, expanding the Council's direct operation of school transport and/or bus services. | Short term: by October 2025 |
| 7 | Bus Information Strategy | Review Aberdeenshire Council's Bus Information Strategy. | Medium-term: by April 2027 |
| 8 | Bus Services Performance | Review the methodology applied, using a performance management framework model (PMF), for assessing the performance of Council supported bus services or journeys | Short to medium-term: by October 2026 |
| 9 | Funding | Seek opportunities for external investment in the public transport network. | Ongoing |



A fuller explanation of what each of these tasks involves is provided below.

1. Strategy Delivery: SMART Transport Objectives

SMART Transport Objectives will be set out, detailing what is to be achieved, how each objective will be measured, the potential targets to be achieved and an indication of the timescale for delivering the objectives. In several cases it will be advantageous to align these with targets to be progressed during the development and implementation of the proposed Bus Services Improvement Partnership Plan. The development of the SMART objectives will be overseen by the Council's Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Working Group.

2. Partnership: Bus Services Improvement Partnership

The Council proposes to make a Bus Services Improvement Partnership (BSIP) Plan jointly with Aberdeen City Council and, in doing so, enter a statutory partnership with North-East of Scotland Bus Alliance partners to enhance bus service quality standards across the north-east of Scotland and gain access to new funding for public transport services and infrastructure.

A BSIP Plan is being developed and is intended to bring benefits to existing and new bus passengers through enhanced quality and efficiency of bus services, support the efficient use of the road network, reduce the impact of traffic congestion, and assist in enhancing air quality. Further benefits in relation to economic development, equalities and climate change are also envisaged. The BSIP Plan will comprise a series of statutory BSIP Schemes, whereby any local authority investment will be matched by bus operator commitment to meet specified service standards.

3. Bus Services Network: Review

The proposed North-East of Scotland Bus Services Improvement Plan would include a commitment to review the bus network across the north-east of Scotland on a phased area-by-area basis, in collaboration with bus operators. The intention is to jointly appraise the effectiveness of the commercial and council-supported bus networks, to identify opportunities to achieve greater integration of services and therefore provide a more attractive, co-ordinated and sustainable transport system connecting communities within and to/from Aberdeenshire.



The proposed series of area-based appraisal exercises will consider the relative merits of scheduled fixed route bus services, demand responsive transport services and, where considered appropriate, the role of the community transport sector, along with potential integration of school and other public sector passenger transport services. Consideration will be given to how this can be done using a data-led place-based approach in line with Aberdeenshire Council's Place Strategy and Place Policy, recognising that different places in Aberdeenshire have varying needs and requirements. This is in line with place and wellbeing outcomes developed for Scotland under the 'Movement' theme, that recognise public transport as being key, with the goal being that everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate, and safe public transport service.

In reviewing the network, the Council will be mindful of the implications of Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) and the opportunities afforded by Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT), as per actions 4 and 5 respectively.

4. Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART): Progress Vision

The Council is working with its North-East Bus Alliance partners of Aberdeen City Council, Nestrans and bus operators to develop Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART), a world-class next-generation public transport system. ART is intended to provide fast, frequent and reliable services through a combination of dedicated bus lanes, off vehicle fare collection, fast and efficient boarding and alighting, and high-capacity and high-quality rapid transit vehicles.

The vision is for a cross-city network of ART routes, linked to mobility hub and/or park and ride facilities, that connect people to the places they want to go with journey times competitive to the car and providing an attractive, accessible, and easy to use way of travel. Cross-city routes would operate to Blackdog, Craibstone Park and Ride, Portlethen and Westhill. Central to the concept is the delivery of complementary infrastructure improvements for other sustainable modes such as cycling and walking in a co-ordinated and holistic approach. Further information on ART can be found on the Nestrans website at <https://www.nestrans.org.uk/projects/aberdeen-rapid-transit/>.

5. Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT): Explore Opportunities

It is proposed to monitor technological developments in digital demand responsive transport (DDRT) and explore opportunities for developing DDRT taxi and/or bus services in Aberdeenshire, building on the lessons learnt from the Ready2Go Around Inverurie DDRT pilot service and within the context of other innovative approaches to shared mobility to determine the extent to which DDRT can contribute to a more effective and efficient bus network particularly in rural areas.



Ready2Go was a public bus service providing demand responsive transport for those booking travel using the Ready2Go app or by phoning a Council booking line. Ready2Go replaced and expanded on timetabled bus services operating into Inverurie from outlying areas, picking up and dropping off booked passengers at bus stops, and provided previously unavailable travel opportunities. Ready2Go used five wheelchair-accessible minibuses and ran during set hours, with no fixed timetable, operating within a designated area on a flexible basis rather than following fixed routes.

6. Council Bus Operations: Review

Work was undertaken by consultants in 2024 to benchmark operation of the Council's 'in-house' passenger transport fleet comprising approximately 60 minibuses mainly used to deliver home-to-school or adult social work transport, but with some vehicles additionally used in-between times for dial-a-bus services, and to consider whether a business case could be made to expand the operation of the Council's fleet. It was concluded that there is scope to expand in-house operations, initially for school transport and perhaps also providing more inter-peak bus journeys in between school transport services. The consultants did not recommend that the Council acquire a PSV Operator's Licence or establish a bus-operating ALEO.

Building on this work, the Council will consider the review recommendations and agree a course of action, under the direction of the School Transport Member Officer Working Group.

7. Bus Information Strategy: Review

The Council's current Bus Information Strategy, which can be found at https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/7959/businfostrategy_004.pdf, was published in 2010 to demonstrate the objectives and means by which passenger information about the bus network is disseminated through scheduled bus timetables and real time passenger information. The standards, commitments and responsibilities of all parties involved in delivering bus passenger information will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing economic and legislative conditions and the opportunities for enhanced provision afforded by technological developments in this field.

8. Bus Services Performance: Review PMF Model

The Council uses a performance management framework (PMF) model for ranking the relative effectiveness of supported passenger transport services to assist in determining best value and aiming to ensure that investment of public money in the operation of such services is made in the most cost-effective manner. The model is applied to local bus contracts, including timetabled and demand responsive services, and in-house 'public' transport services such as A2B dial-a-bus. After services



have been ranked from 'best' performing to 'poorest' performing based on the criteria used within the model, other factors are considered based on local circumstances prior to making any final assessment on whether services or part-services can/should be supported by the Council.

A review will be undertaken to assess whether improvements can be made to the criteria used within the model. Consideration will also be given as to how the issue of connectivity can be encompassed and the implications of place-based planning.

9. Funding

In keeping with the Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2024-2029 and its priorities for connected communities, it is proposed to collaborate with partners and communities to attract investment to enhance transport connections, taking a place-based approach supported by the place and wellbeing outcome framework.

External funding could be used to complement Council investment in the bus network by supporting the provision of, or enhancing, bus services and associated infrastructure. It would be the intention that any such funding would be invested using a place-based approach acknowledging the specific challenges and opportunities within different communities to ensure local sustainable solutions and changes are identified that support the wellbeing of the communities in those places.



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